

THE RISE OF ARISTOCRACY IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK

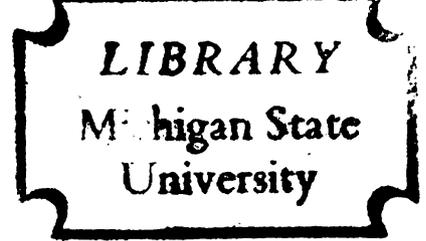
1830-1860

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Douglas T. Miller

1965



This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

THE RISE OF ARISTOCRACY
IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK
1830-1860
presented by

DOUGLAS T. MILLER

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in HISTORY

German M. Osterander
Major professor

Date JUNE 11, 1965

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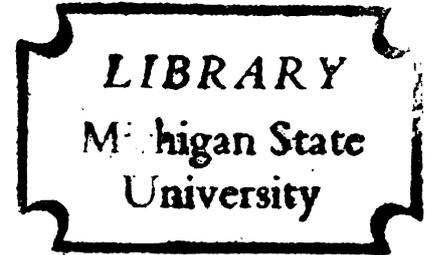
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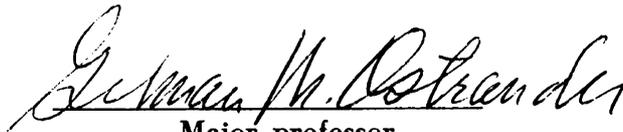
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ABSTRACT

THE RISE OF ARISTOCRACY IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK
1830-1860

by Douglas T. Miller

The thesis of this work is that aristocracy distinctly increased in the state of New York during the three decades preceding the Civil War. This study does not deny that representative political institutions based on nearly universal white manhood suffrage were the rule in this era. What is questioned is the assumption that throughout this period democracy meant social and economic equality as well as political rights.

The United States, of course, had no hereditary nobility in the European sense. Aristocracy in this country could best be defined as consisting of those persons regarded as superior to the rest of the community in such things as wealth, rank, manners, dress, speech, family, and intellect. Of these, wealth was the outstanding criterion for high social standing, and as long as inequalities of wealth were comparatively slight, as was the case in the early 1830's, it was easy for Americans to associate political democracy with a general equality of condition.

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However, the concept of equality itself had a meaning peculiar to America. As a belief it did not imply that the rich should be reduced to the level of the poor. Equality meant that each person should have an equal chance to outstrip his neighbor and to become rich. Since not everyone was as materially successful as everyone else, this emphasis on achievement helped create growing inequalities which were then often perpetuated.

The forces underlying the changing class structure of New York society were largely economic. Improved transportation and industrialization gave rise to the factory system in which workers were clearly separated from employers. Even in the traditional craft trades a wedge was driven between the journeyman and master as the latter was forced to increase his production and reduce his costs in order to compete on a national market. The labor movement of the Jacksonian period temporarily buoyed the skilled artisan, but was unable to stay labor's decline, and collapsed completely following the panic of 1837.

In the forties and fifties working conditions further deteriorated. In the mechanized factory, which more and more replaced the craft shop, workers were employed for a wage, selling their labor and not a product.

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Working conditions were also worsened by the massive influx of immigrants during these years. Not only did they flood the labor market, reducing wages and social mobility, they also augmented class consciousness. Native Americans, rich and poor alike, tended to look down on these newcomers, considering them social inferiors. The immigrants for their part were forced out of necessity to accept menial positions. This is best illustrated by their role as domestic servants. Livery, which servants scorned as undemocratic in Jacksonian New York, became commonplace in the forties and fifties as thousands of immigrants filled the growing demand for servile domestics. By the eve of the Civil War there existed a sizable pauperized proletariat in New York State.

At the other extreme these same years witnessed the rise of a plutocratic aristocracy which was city-centered and more wealthy and powerful than any earlier American gentry. The Industrial Revolution in conjunction with gains in commercial wealth and urban land values created many substantial fortunes. Those acquiring wealth also gained social notoriety and a good deal of control over New York's manufacturing, transportation, and commercial facilities. Lavish and conspicuous living became characteristic of this new elite, and

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by the 1850's the outlines of the social divisions associated with the post-war Gilded Age were easily discernible in the state of New York.

THE RISE OF ARISTOCRACY IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK

1830-1860

By

DOUGLAS T. MILLER

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

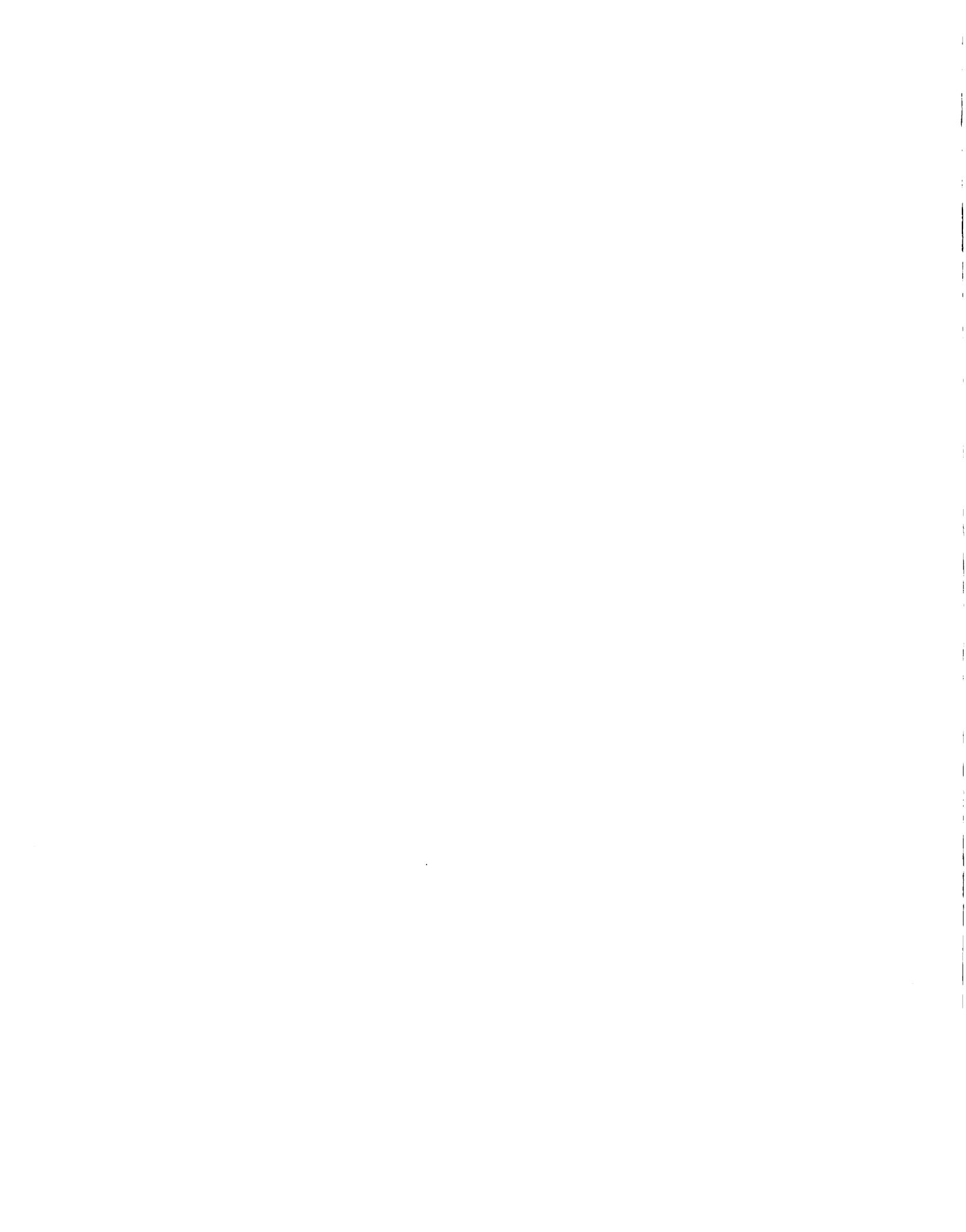
Department of History

1965

PREFACE

The uniqueness of American history, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, rests primarily on the early triumph of democracy in this country. Native Americans from Franklin to Whitman never tired of proclaiming the virtues of our democratic institutions, and historians have concentrated on the growth of democracy as the central theme in the nation's history. Yet this concentration on the development of democracy in the period before the Civil War is misleading since it overlooks powerful forces that ran counter to this development and worked toward the stratification of society. In New York State, at any rate, during the period from 1830 to 1860 aristocracy clearly increased, causing democracy to weaken.

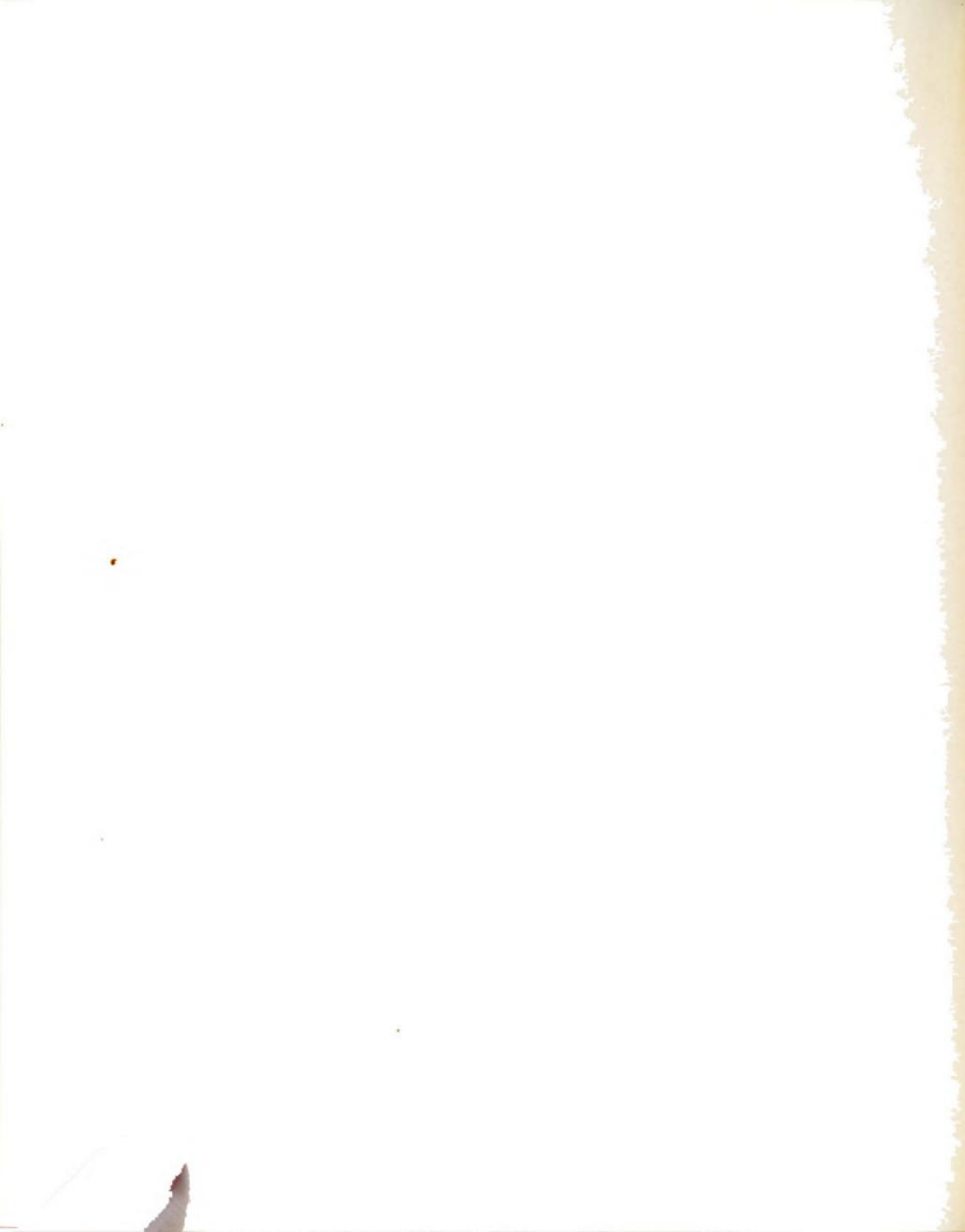
To write of the rise of aristocracy in Jacksonian New York is to contradict traditional beliefs and interpretations. Politically this was the age of democracy as historians have repeatedly emphasized. Writers often disagree as to the sources of Jacksonian democracy or as to whether democratic reforms were part of the Jacksonian movement or preceded the rise of Jackson, but none question the fact that political democracy made substantial advances in the first half of the nineteenth century. For New York State



this democratic triumph was carefully documented nearly fifty years ago in a work that has since become a minor classic The Decline of Aristocracy In the Politics of New York (1919), by Dixon Ryan Fox. More recently aspects of Fox's study has been subject to critical re-evaluation, most notably in Lee Benson's book, The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case (1961). But even Benson, who has denied the validity of the traditional concept of Jacksonian democracy, maintains that New York State politics passed through an egalitarian revolution between 1815 and the Civil War.¹

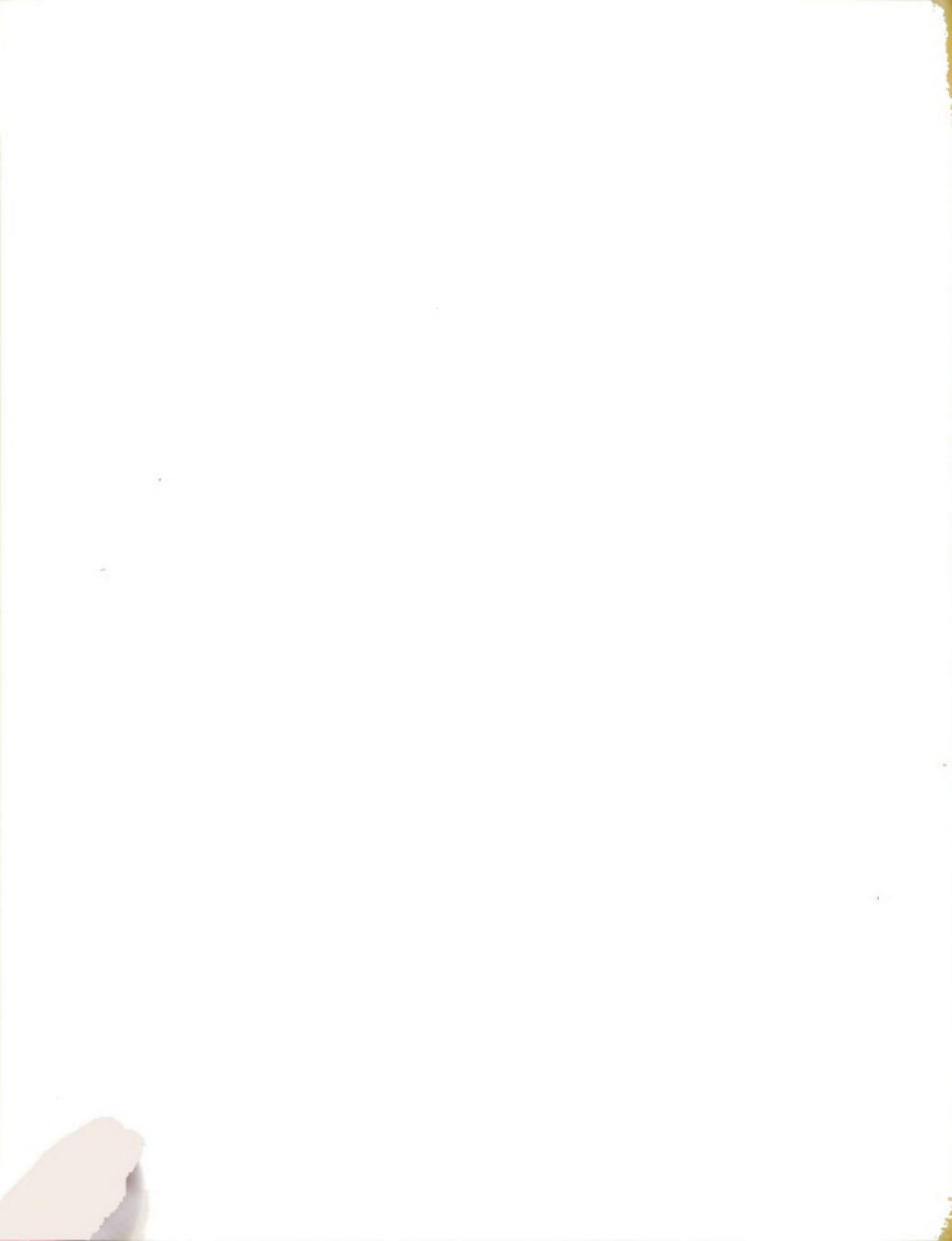
Implicit in most political studies of the Jacksonian era is the notion that democracy was victorious not only in the political realm but socially and economically as well. Benson, for example, writes that "after 1815, not only in politics but in all spheres of American life, egalitarianism challenged elitism and, in most spheres and places, egalitarianism won."²

This theme has been expressed even more explicitly by writers who have directed their attention to the study of American society during the age of Jackson. Carl Russell Fish in 1927 contributed a volume to the History of American Life series covering the years from 1830 to 1850; the central theme of this book was conveyed in the title, The Rise of the Common Man. Fish's study, too, has been criticized by later historians,³ but his general thesis remains intact.



As a recent writer states, "the age of the common man in American history is the period of the early nineteenth century, somewhere between Jefferson and the Civil War, roughly coincident with Andrew Jackson's coming to power and the formation of the Democratic party."⁴

This present study on The Rise of Aristocracy in the State of New York, 1830-1860 does not deny that representative political institutions based on nearly universal white manhood suffrage were the rule from the Jacksonian era to the Civil War. Politics is given very minor consideration here. What is questioned, however, is the assumption that throughout this period democracy meant social and economic equality as well as political rights. Even in the early 1830's, when that astute French observer Alexis de Tocqueville noted the prevalence of a general "equality of condition" in America, an economic and social aristocracy was discernible in the state of New York. In 1833 William Gouge, a Jacksonian economist, observed that changing economic conditions were having disturbing social effects. "Through all the operations of business," he wrote, "the effects of an unequal distribution of wealth may be distinctly traced. The rich have the means of rewarding most liberally the professional characters whom they employ and the tradesmen with whom they deal. An aristocracy in one department of society introduces an aristocracy into all." This same year, 1833, Ely Moore, a New York printer and labor leader, wrote that



"even in this fair land of freedom, where liberty and equality are guaranteed to all, and where our written constitutions have so wisely provided limitations to power, . . . the twin fiends, intolerance and aristocracy, presume to rear their hateful crests!"⁵

The United States, of course, had no hereditary nobility in the European sense. Aristocracy in this country could best be defined as consisting of those persons regarded as superior to the rest of the community in such things as wealth, rank, manners, dress, speech, family, and intellect. Of these, wealth was the outstanding criterion for high social standing, and as long as inequalities of wealth were comparatively slight as was the case in the early 1830's it was easy for Americans to associate political democracy with a general equality of condition.

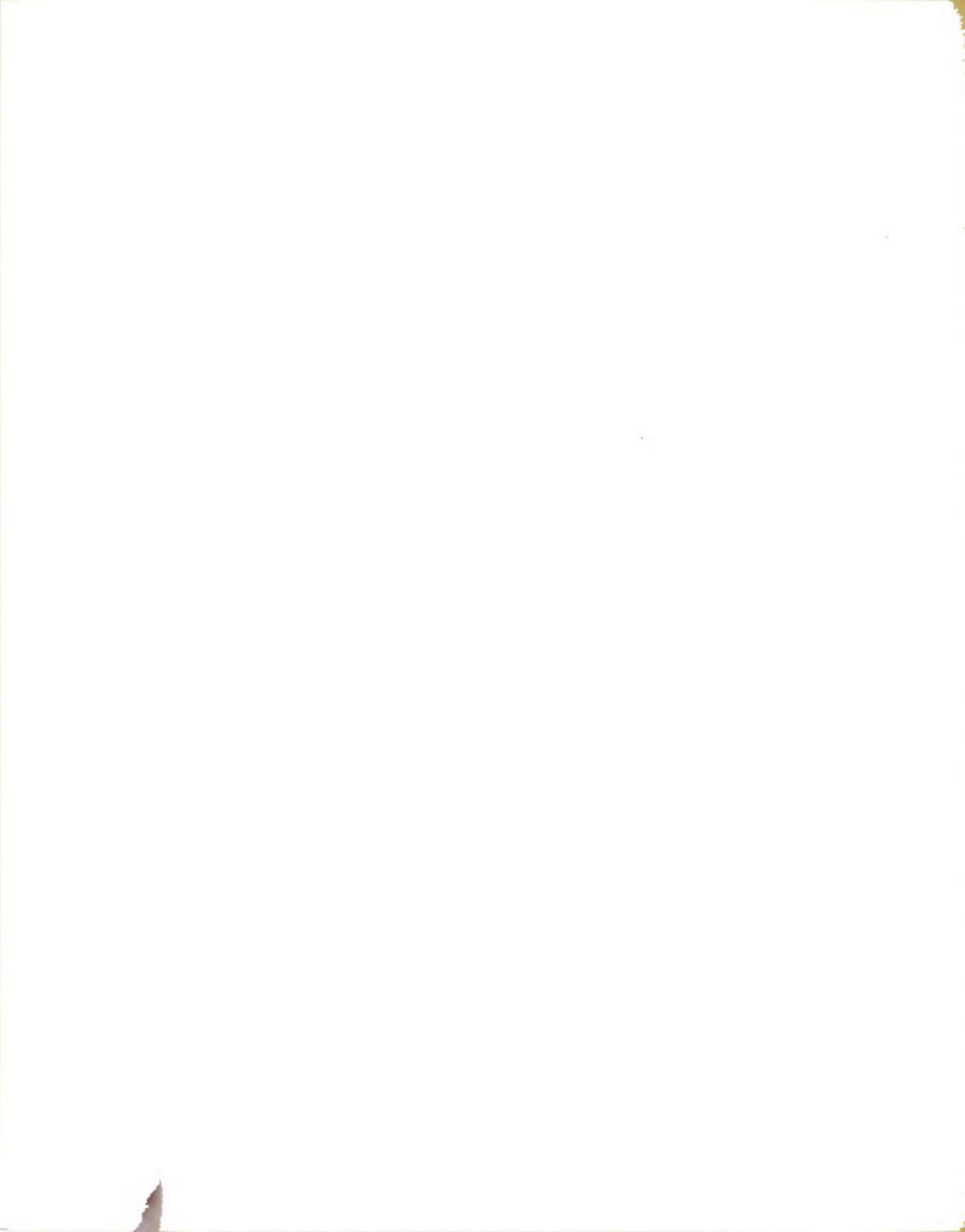
However, the concept of equality itself had a meaning peculiar to America. As a belief it did not imply that the rich should be reduced to the level of the poor. Equality meant that each person should have an equal chance to outstrip his neighbor and to become rich. As long as America remained a land of small farmers, craftsmen, and merchants there did not appear to be any contradiction between the notion of equality of opportunity and a general equality of condition.

But the three decades preceding the Civil War witnessed a major economic transformation. In these years the



revolutions in industry and transportation radically altered the relatively homogeneous middle-class society of the early nineteenth century. Great wealth was created, giving rise to a new plutocratic aristocracy clearly set off from the masses. At the other extreme, heavy immigration and industrialization greatly increased the size of the laboring class while reducing the workers' social mobility and general position. The purpose of this book is to present a history of these important changes in New York society from the age of Jackson to the Civil War.

For encouragement and guidance in the writing of this dissertation, I wish to express my foremost thanks to the director of my doctoral program, Gilman M. Ostrander. Professor Ostrander's friendly actuation and critical advice were invaluable at every step of the way. I also wish to thank Russel B. Nye and Stuart W. Bruchey for stimulating my original interest in Jacksonian history, and James Henderson and Mara Wolfgang for reading all or part of the original manuscript. In my research I was assisted by the courteous staffs of the New York Public Library, Columbia University Library, the New York Historical Society, and the libraries of Michigan State University and the University of Maine. Finally, I wish to express deep gratitude to my wife, Sheila Miller, whose aid, criticism, interest, and friendly obstructions have made this work a pleasure.



FOOTNOTES

¹Benson, The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy (New York, 1964 ed.), pp. 5, 329-38.

²Ibid., p. 336.

³See: Marcus Cunliffe, The Nation Takes Shape, 1789-1837 (Chicago, 1959), pp. 150-57.

⁴John William Ward, "The Age of the Common Man," in John Higham, ed., The Reconstruction of American History (New York, 1962), p. 82.

⁵Quoted in Joseph L. Blau, ed., Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy (New York, 1954), pp. 185, 290.



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CHAPTER 1

EQUALITY

The equality of the United States is no more absolute than that of any other country. There may be less inequality in this nation than in most others, but inequality exists, and, in some respects, with stronger features than it is usual to meet with in the rest of christendom.

--James Fenimore Cooper,
The American Democrat (1838)

I

Early in 1832 Calvin Colton, a New York journalist, wrote that "in America a man may create stations and make places, and can always find such already open, as might satisfy any reasonable ambition." The City and State of New York, he went on to say, "for a long time yet to come, will present wide and inexhaustible fields of enterprize."¹ Colton was writing during the age of Jackson, a period in which enterprise seemed the most general American characteristic as persons optimistically attempted to satisfy their "reasonable ambitions." The opportunity to realize one's aspirations, largely economic, together with political democracy and the lack of great extremes between the rich and the poor made equality seem a dynamic reality in the state of New York during the early 1830's.²



CHAPTER 1

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I

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This equality of condition during the Jacksonian era was common to the country as a whole and not merely to New York State. Foreign observers were struck by this social democracy. The French observer, Alexis de Tocqueville, found the similarity of fortunes the most important single factor in shaping American society, manners, and institutions. He wrote in the introductory chapter of his classic Democracy in America that:

Amongst the novel objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of conditions. I readily discovered the prodigious influence which this primary fact exercises on the whole course of society. . . . The more I advanced in the study of American society, the more I perceived that the equality of conditions is the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived, and the central point at which all my observations constantly terminated.³

Similarly Tocqueville's fellow countryman, Michael Chevalier, compared American society to Europe stood on its head. "In the United States," he wrote, "the democratic spirit is infused into all the national habits and all the customs of society; it besets and startles at every step the foreigner who, before landing in this country, had no suspicion to what a degree his every nerve and fiber had been steeped in aristocracy by a European education."⁴

American equality was not only noticeable; it was aggressive and boisterous. Historians have often described as an example of triumphant egalitarianism, the rough crowds who elbowed their way into the White House at Jackson's first

inauguration. Other instances of this forceful, if often feigned, spirit are legion. Visiting a Western town the Duke of Saxe Weimar was nearly pommelled for his presumptuous attempt to hire an entire stagecoach for himself and his valet. On another occasion this same duke went in a hackney-coach to a party in New York City. The next day the driver came for his money, asking the duke whether he was the man he had driven the night before, and, on being answered in the affirmative, informed him that "he was the gentleman what drove him," and that he had come for his half-dollar.⁵ Except in the Eastern cities distinctions in accommodations were rare, and in the smaller towns it was common for an innkeeper to lodge as many as ten or twelve persons in a room, often sleeping two or three in the same bed. More fastidious travellers who requested private quarters were considered unreasonable and were seldom obliged.⁶ Like the astonished Ishmael of Moby Dick, a lodger in this period was apt to awaken in the presence of any kind of strange bedfellow. In myriad other ways Americans showed their scorn of aristocratic pretensions. Stage drivers ate at the same table with passengers, and they further asserted their independence, to the disgust of many foreign travellers, by swearing boisterously and refusing to help with baggage.⁷ "Boys, and even men," the novelist Cooper complained, "wear their hats in the houses of all classes. . . ."⁸



The way in which Americans, in Tocqueville's words, "pounce upon equality as their booty" is perhaps best illustrated by the relationship between servants and their masters. Except in the South where, of course, slaves were used, there was no permanent class of domestic servants. Yet there was a great need and demand for such a class, since housework for a family was hard and took long hours. Even persons with ample incomes found it difficult to obtain good servants. To help remedy this situation a group of New York City residents in 1825 formed a "Society For the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants." This organization hoped to obtain good servants by offering "liberal premiums to those domestics who conduct well and remain longest in a family;" and thereby "to remedy that restlessness, and love of change in them, which produces so much inconvenience to all house-keepers." The premiums were graded so that the longer one remained in the service of a family the higher his bonus payment would be.⁹ However, judging from the numerous subsequent complaints, the society seems to have had little success in inducing more persons to enter domestic service.

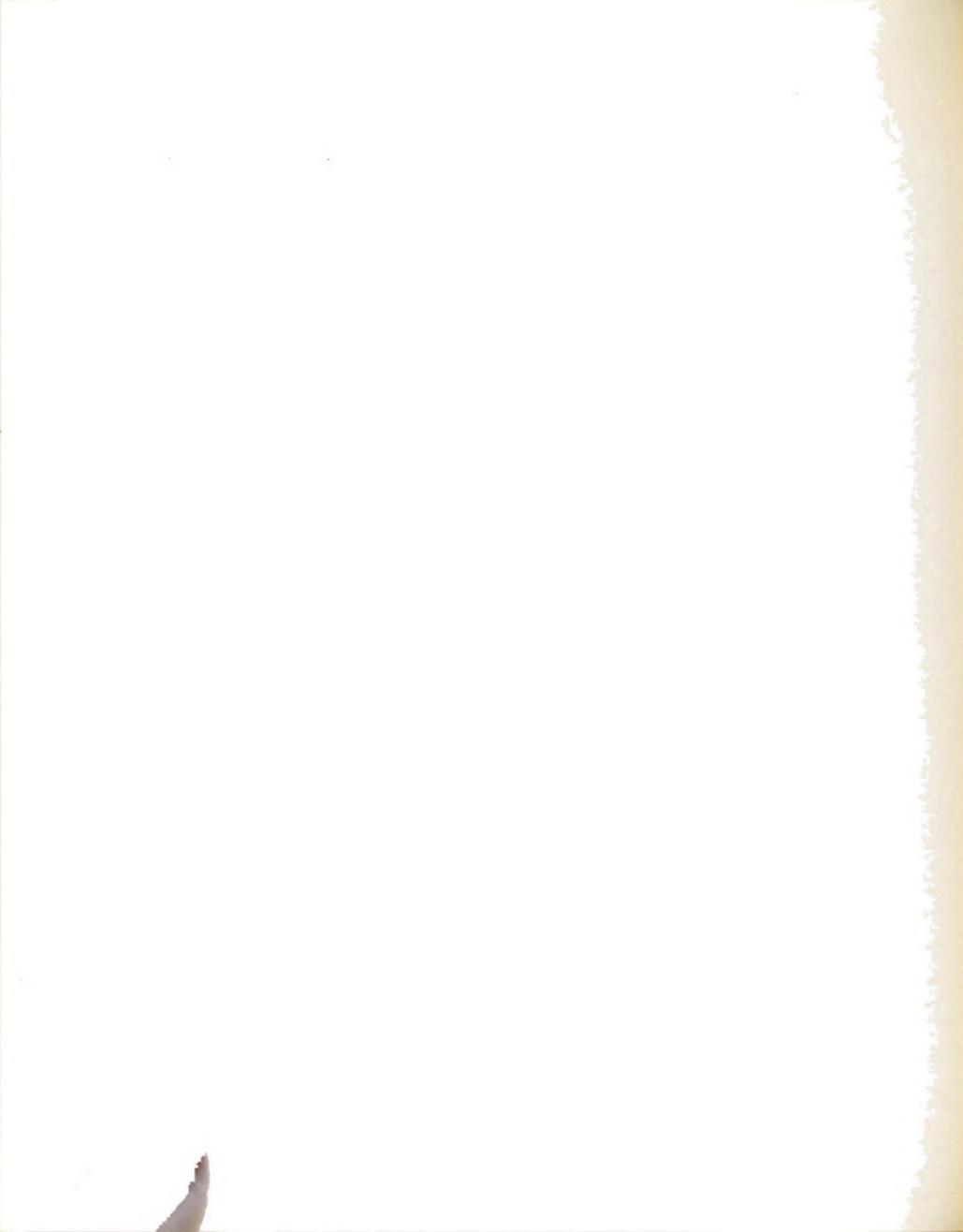
Native Americans especially were adverse to following this profession, considering it degrading. Two things which they particularly resented were the term "servant" itself, and the wearing of livery. This first objection was bypassed by substituting the term "help" for "servant."

Help implied a position of equality, domestic helpers usually hiring themselves out for a limited period only. They did not consider themselves as servants and refused to be treated as such. In the smaller towns it was quite common for the help to eat at the same table with their employers, to attend the same church, and in other ways to act as social equals. As for livery, most domestics simply refused to wear any. "There are but few native Americans," one foreigner commented, "who would submit to the degradation of wearing a livery, or any other badge of servitude." Another foreign visitor wrote of the American servant that "the man will not wear a livery, any more than he will wear a halter round his neck."¹⁰ Not only did domestic servants refuse to wear livery, but even policemen, firemen, coachmen, and conductors resisted all efforts to introduce uniforms.¹¹

Both the shortage of servants and their equalitarian pretensions were commented upon in travellers' accounts. A Britisher wrote this:

The native men . . . seem averse to servitude, and are rarely to be found in this capacity. The women are somewhat more ready to help out; but servants entertain such notions of equality and independence as fit them poorly for this station of life, and tend greatly to abridge the comforts of their employers. . . .

Another Englishman lamented that servants never seemed to be available when wanted. "It seems the servants themselves, or the helps, or hirelings, or whatever name they think it least degrading to go by, do not like being summoned by a



ringing of bells. Accordingly, there was often no method left, but to do the things required ourselves." This writer went on to deplore the "total want of good servants in America. . . . Good nurses, men servants, cooks, or any description of female attendants are rarely to be found; and if found, no money will bribe them to stay long in a house, or to behave respectfully there."¹² Americans were so opposed to the concept of servitude that the author of an etiquette book had to assure his readers that with all due deference to republican feelings it was not incorrect to close a letter: "I have the honour to be your very obedient servant."¹³

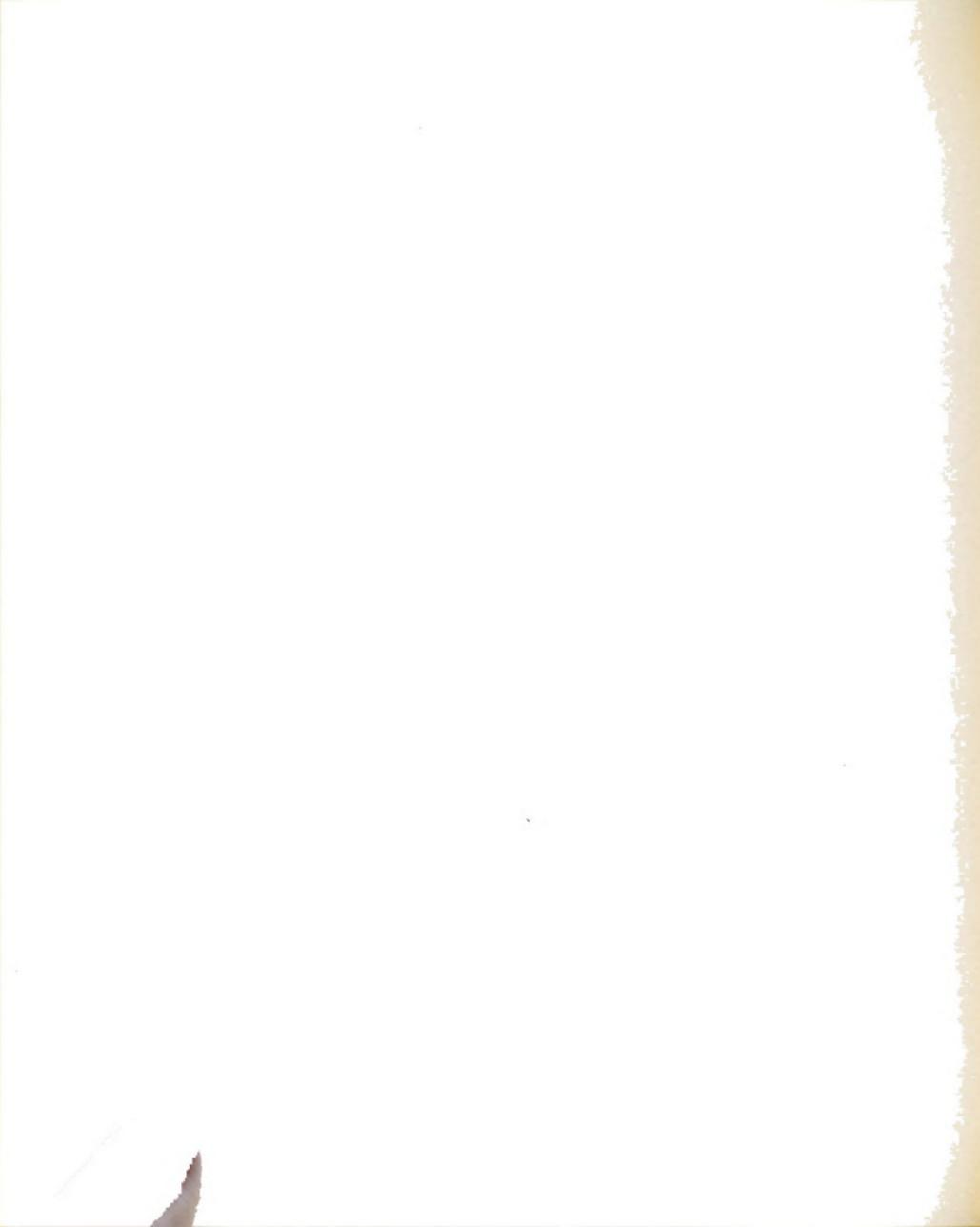
Additional aspects of American life reflected a similar dislike of social distinctions. Aristocratic gentlemen of the Revolutionary period had been meticulous about their dress: the powder and queues, the cock-hats and broad brims, the white-top boots or buckled shoes, the silk stockings, and the close-fitting doeskin knee breeches. But by the 1830's only a few tottering and conservative old gentlemen--relics from an earlier era--clung to the former styles. Men of all classes dressed in pantaloons, coat and waistcoat, and round hats with narrow brims; short trimmed hair replaced the formal powdered whigs. This is not to say that the dress of a well-to-do gentleman could not be distinguished from the daily attire of a mechanic or laborer, but the marked class distinctions of dress had become less pronounced, and it was



not uncommon for lower and middle-class men to appear dressed in the best of fashion, even if their coats and pantaloons were of a poorer quality and their collars and shirts false. One visitor was surprised to see common workers wearing "sleek coats, glossy hats, gay watch-guards, and doe-skin gloves!"¹⁴

In woman's dress a similar democratization occurred. Powdered hair and long colonial silks were seldom seen in the Jacksonian period. American women, especially in New York, followed the latest fashions from London and Paris. Ladies of New York society often spent great sums in procuring their clothing, but no longer were these wives and daughters of the wealthy the only ones elegantly dressed in the latest styles. Fashionable dress was worn by a larger portion of the population than previously, and it was not uncommon to see serving girls or seamstresses promenading Broadway as smartly attired as the daughters of rich merchants.¹⁵

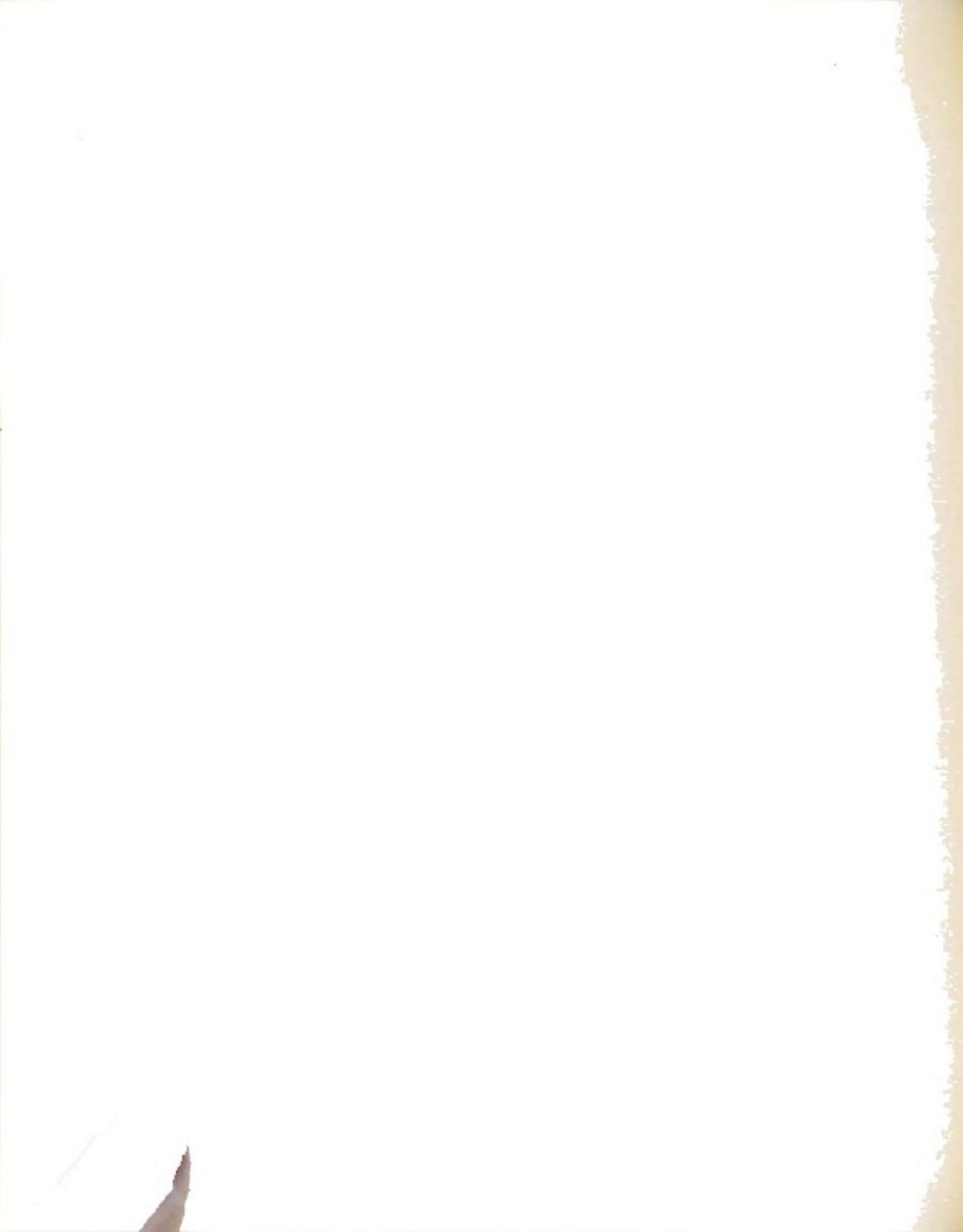
Distinctions in housing also decreased. Most residences were constructed of wood in this period, and because of the ready availability of lumber, they were fairly inexpensive to construct. A substantial six room house could be built for as little as eight hundred dollars; twenty-five hundred dollars would purchase a town mansion or a country villa. This meant that a person earning an average income could afford an adequate home, while the acquisition of a



superior dwelling was within the reach of those who earned slightly more than the average American.¹⁶

The revolutionary improvements in transportation made travel possible for a large portion of the population and helped level class distinctions in travelling. Prior to the introduction of steamboats and steam engines, and the building of canals, turnpikes and railroads, travel had been a slow, laborious, and expensive undertaking. Because of this, only the wealthy could afford frequent trips. Many well-to-do gentlemen owned private carriages--a luxury indulged in chiefly by the opulent. However, with the increased use of steam power and the advancement of roads, rails and canals, Americans as a whole became more mobile. The cost of journeying was greatly reduced and in most ships, stages, packets and trains, there were no first class accommodations. A gentleman writing in the mid-1830's deplored the fact that in railroad cars and steamboats "the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, the polite and the vulgar, all herd on the cabin floor of the steamer, feed at the same table, sit in each others laps, as it were, in the cars. . . . Steam, so useful in many respects, interferes with the comfort of travelling, [and] destroys every salutary distinction in society. . . ." ¹⁷

In Europe established religion was one of the mainstays of aristocracy. But here, where there was no established church, all religions had to fend for themselves.



Church sects, therefore, tended to cater to popular sentiment and reflected the equalitarian spirit of the majority. Even the hierarchical Catholic Church adapted to democracy in the United States. In the older seaboard states certain churches were the strongholds of conservatism. In New York the Anglican Church, which had enjoyed official status in colonial days, remained largely a class church, its members including many rich merchants and large landholders. The Dutch Reformed Church in areas such as Albany, where descendants of the original Dutch settlers were numerous, also tended to be a church of the elite. But both these churches had declined in relative importance with the spread of the more democratic and emotional religious sects. Evangelical religion made sweeping gains in New York State during the early decades of the nineteenth century, especially in the central and western areas. The Methodists made the most spectacular gains. They utilized itinerant lay preachers and made converts without regard to social status. Similar success in increasing membership was achieved by the Baptist and Presbyterian evangelists. So successful were various revivalist preachers that upstate New York became permanently affected with fundamentalist Protestant doctrine. These churches, instead of upholding privileged orders and becoming a bulwark of aristocracy, tended to be equalitarian and humanitarian, concerned with such social problems as intemperance and slavery.¹⁸



The American spirit of equality was infectious. Lower class persons, who in Europe did not dare to demand equal rights, came to this country with the belief that here all men were free and on even terms, and that, provided they pay the same money, they were as important as any other member of society. When addressed by a commoner upon debarking from a ship in New York harbor, a gentleman complained to his friend that "this fellow here would not have dared to speak to us while on board of the packet; and now he is scarcely in sight of the American soil before he thinks himself just as good as anybody else."¹⁹

Even foreigners of relatively high social standing in their own countries who settled permanently in the United States were generally affected by American egalitarianism. A well-to-do British gentleman residing in western New York wrote to a friend in England that "we have not more than one in a thousand [here] that retain the degrading principles of the old country; viz., that pride and conceit of being too good to sit at the same table, to eat and drink with their own servants, or those who labour for them."²⁰ Francis Grund, a German nobleman who emigrated to this country, became a staunch supporter of the average American's notions of equality. In his book Aristocracy in America he ridiculed those Americans who abandoned republican principles and attempted to establish an aristocracy. "I can assure you," wrote Grund, "that in my own heart I have a much higher

respect for the common American, who, in his conduct toward strangers, is solely guided by his own rude notion of dignity, than the educated gentleman, who measures everything, and himself into the bargain, by the standard of another country" (p. 30).

II

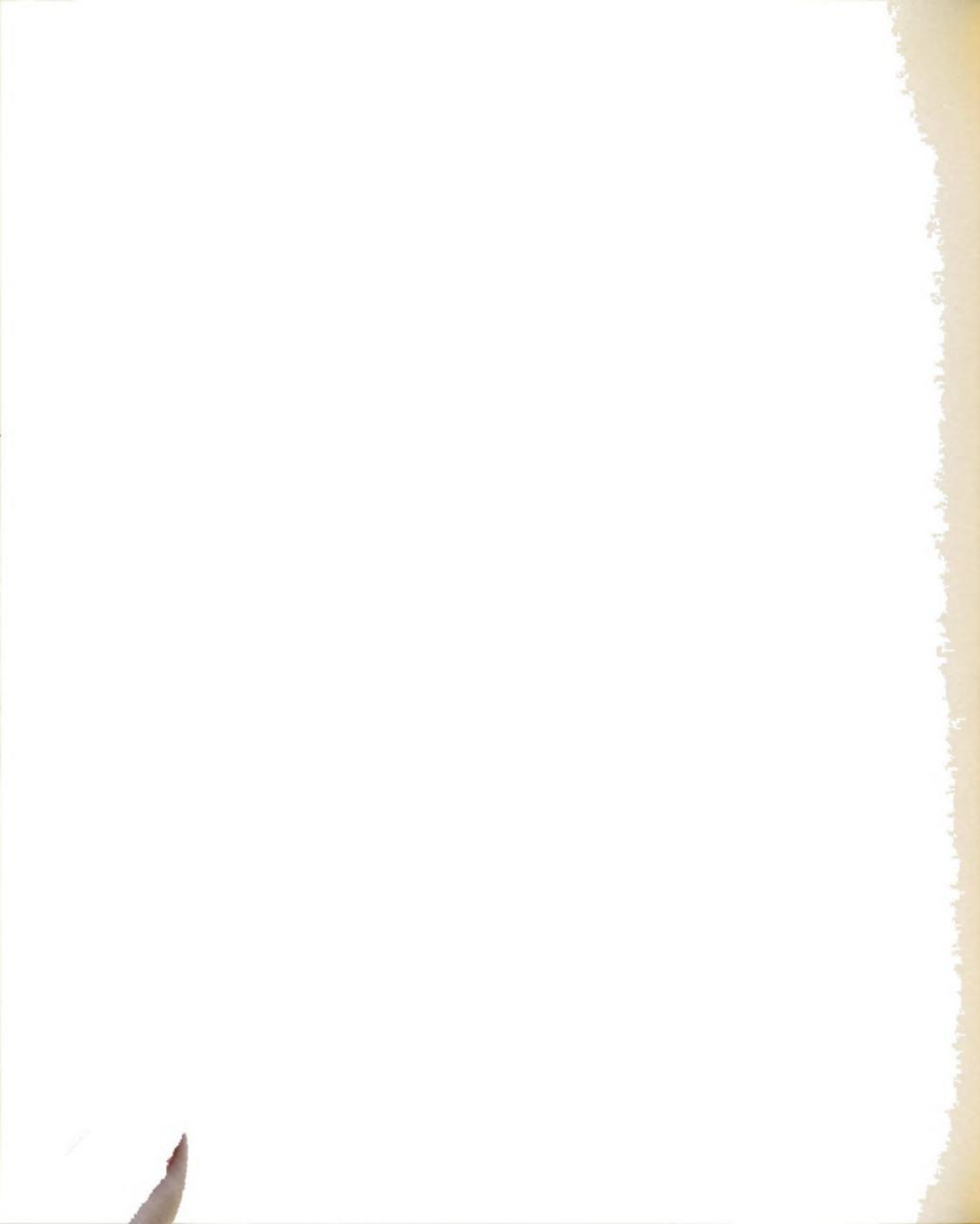
In politics, as with social practices, a similarly democratic spirit prevailed. The victory of Andrew Jackson in the presidential election of 1828 has generally been viewed as the triumph of political democracy and the emergence of the common man as the most significant political force. America had long been a democracy in terms of voting rights, but it was not completely so in terms of who was elected. Most American leaders during the Revolutionary period and the first decades of the New Republic were men of the better sort--distinguishable from the ordinary American by wealth, education, family tradition, dress and manners. But by the 1820's aristocratic rule was rapidly eroding before the flood of democratic feelings. State governments were the first to capitulate to the popular will by introducing universal white manhood suffrage.

In New York State democratic reform was long overdue when a Constitutional Convention was convened in 1821, to revise the highly conservative constitution of 1777. The 1777 document had established a dual electorate. Twenty-pound



freeholders and 40-shilling renters could vote for state assemblymen, but only 100-pound freeholders might vote for senators and the governor. It has been estimated that approximately 78 percent of adult males could vote for assemblymen, but only 38.7 percent for the senators and the governor. In New York City the percentage of eligible voters had been even lower. There about 62 percent of the adult males qualified as twenty-pound freeholders or 40-shilling renters and thus could vote for the assemblymen; a mere 24 percent owned freehold estates worth 100 pounds or more and were eligible to vote for the senators and the governor.²¹

Besides restricting the suffrage, this antiquated constitution further removed the government from the people by provisions setting up a five man Council of Appointment which controlled appointments to most of the state's public offices, and a seven member Council of Revision having the right to veto popular legislation. Both of these councils had become the tools of the party in power and very often went against the will of the people. Popular sentiment had long favored reforms to change the undemocratic aspects of the outmoded constitution, and by 1820 this popular feeling was too strong for politicians to ignore. The party split between the followers of Governor De Witt Clinton and the Tammany or Bucktail faction nominally led by Martin Van Buren played into the hands of the popular will, since both groups

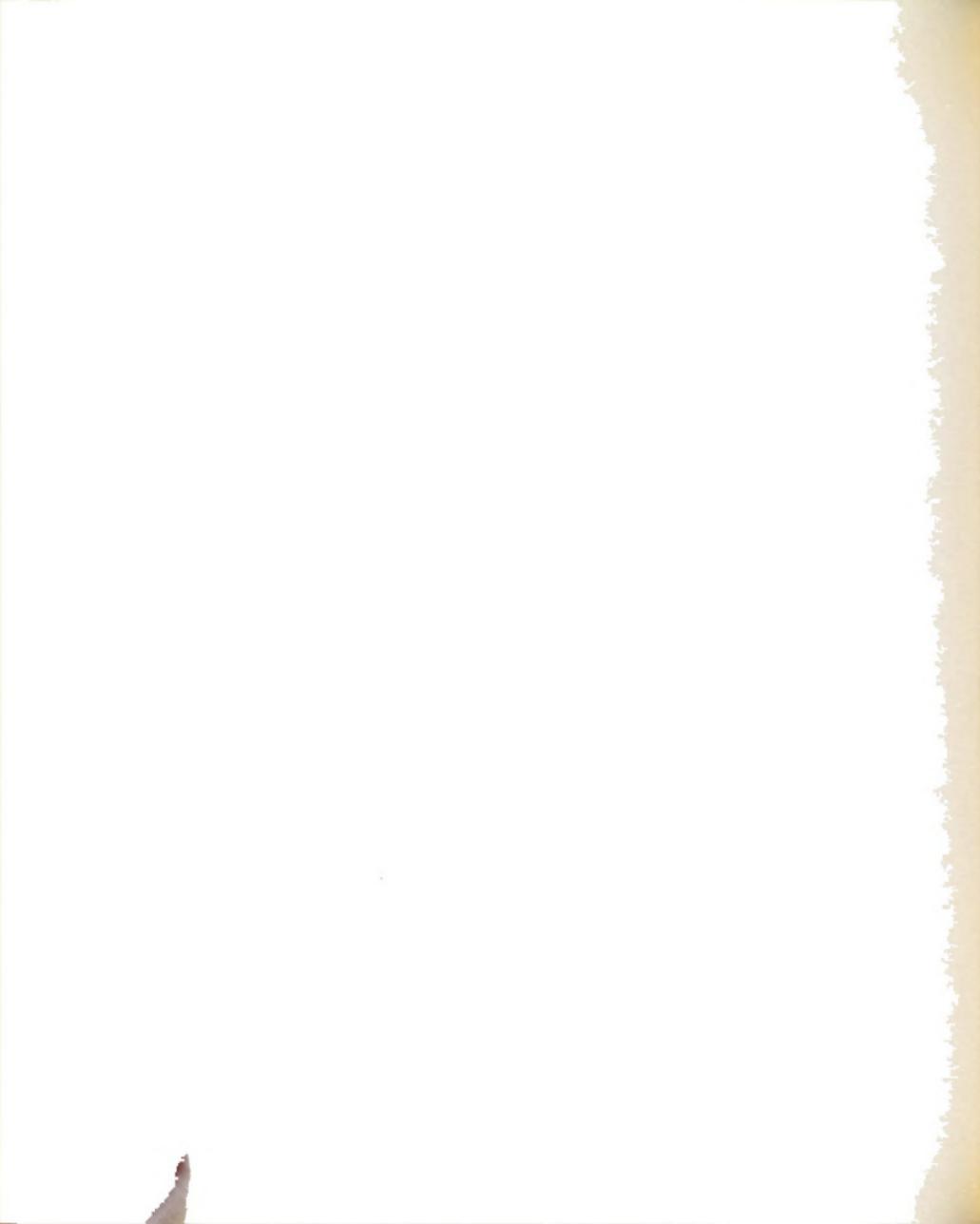


were beginning to find it politically expedient to appear as the champions of the people. Thus when the Constitutional Convention convened at Albany in late August, 1821, most of the 126 delegates present favored some degree of amendment.

The elimination of the Council of Appointment and the Council of Revision was carried by unanimous vote. However, when it came to the question of removing property qualifications for voting there developed what a recent historian has termed "one of the great suffrage debates in American history."²² A small but distinguished group of old style Federalists, led by the eloquent Chancellor of the state, James Kent, steadfastly opposed further suffrage extension. They held that voting was a privilege and not a right, and that the chief functions of government were the protection of property and of individual freedom, not the forcing of the majority will on a reluctant minority. "The tendency of universal suffrage," stated Kent,

is to jeopardize the rights of property and the principles of liberty. . . . There is a constant tendency in the poor to covet and to share the plunder of the rich; in the debtor to relax or avoid the obligations of contract; in the majority to tyrannize over the minority, and to trample down their rights. . . .

Kent went on to express the widely held Federalist fear that in granting universal male suffrage the cities with their large lower class population would soon be able to rule the entire state. "New York is destined to be the future London of America, and in less than a century that city, with the



operation of universal suffrage, and under skillful management will govern this state. . . ."23

In spite of these and other conservative arguments the forces of democracy carried the day. General Erastus Root, one of the leading spokesmen for reform, replied to Kent's aristocratic defense of property. "We have no different estates having different interests, necessary to be guarded from encroachments by the watchful eye of jealousy-- We are all of the same estate--all commoners; nor, until we have privileged orders, and aristocratic estates to defend, can this argument apply."²⁴ This sentiment carried the convention. The vote was given to every white male citizen over twenty-one years of age who had resided one year within the state and six months within his district, and who paid taxes, or worked on the public roads, or served in the militia. Negroes were excluded from voting, unless they owned a freehold worth 100 pounds, which few did. The following year, 1822, the people showed their approval of the new democratic document by ratifying it with a majority of over 33,000 votes.²⁵

Nor was this the end of liberalizing reforms in New York. Four years following the acceptance of the constitution the last restrictions on universal white manhood suffrage were removed; that same year, 1826, the office of justice of the peace was made elective. In 1828 New York voters for the first time voted directly for the presidential



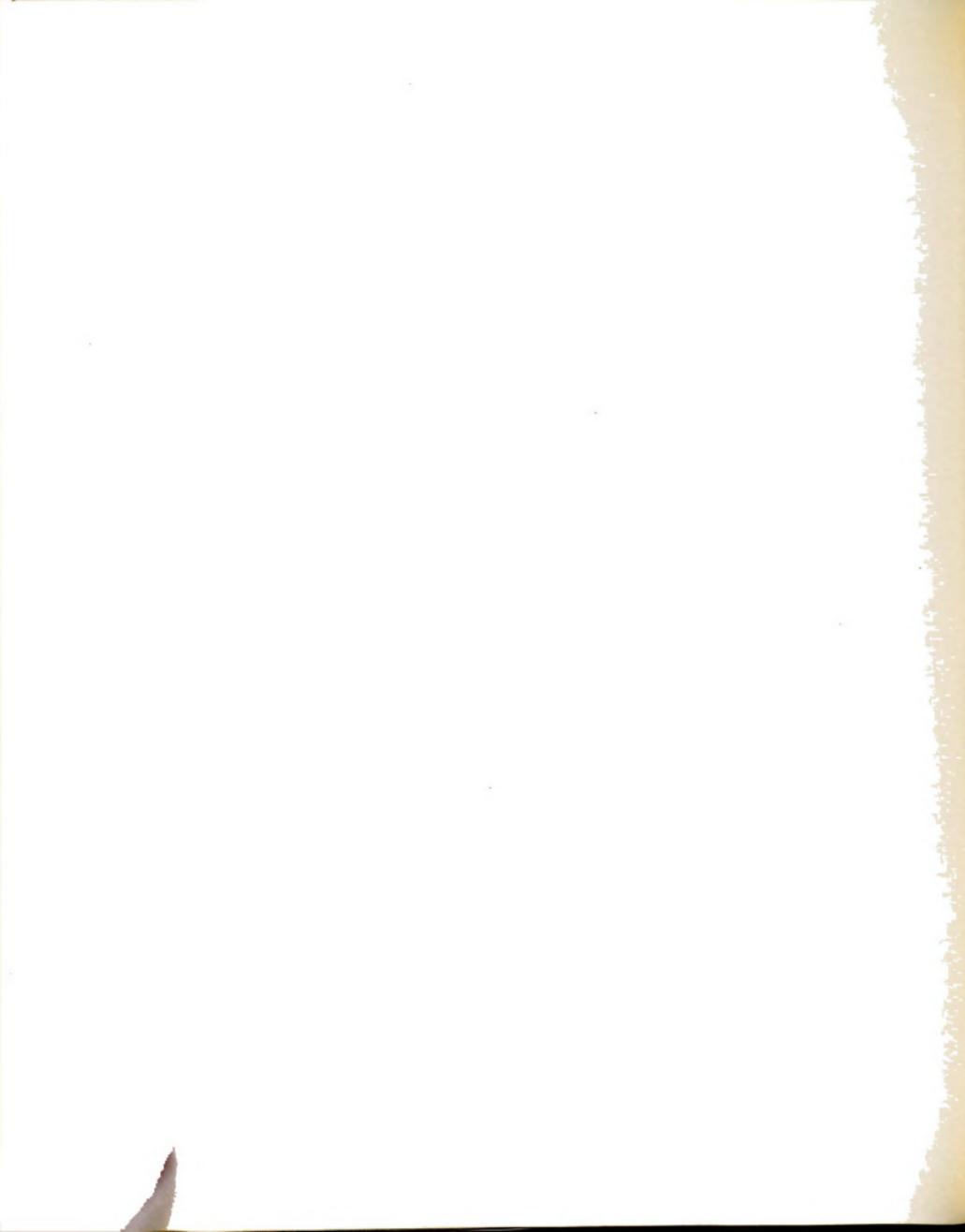
electors, and in doing this they expressed their democratic spirit by voting overwhelmingly for Jackson. The final important pre-Civil War democratic reforms were embodied in a new constitution which was approved in 1846. This document extended the earlier reforms. Most state offices were made elective; property qualifications for governor and state senator were abolished; a commission was established to simplify legal forms and judicial proceedings.

In city politics there was a similar trend toward democracy. New York voters won the right to elect their own mayor in 1833; six years later this privilege was extended to other cities within the state. The urban masses, just as James Kent and other old line Federalists had feared, aggressively expressed their new political position. In 1837 an incident occurred in New York as symbolic of the triumph of the common man in city politics as the rowdy crowds at Jackson's inauguration are in national affairs. It was New Year's Day, and the democratically elected Mayor Cornelius Lawrence (himself a Democrat) was receiving callers in the fashionable New York tradition. What followed is here described by the disapproving aristocrat Philip Hone.

Formerly gentlemen visited the major, saluted him by an honest shake of the hand, paid him the compliment of the day and took their leave. . . . But that respectable functionary is now considered the mayor of a party, and the rabble considering him "hail fellow well met," use his house as a Five Points tavern. . . . The scene yesterday defies description. At ten o'clock the doors were beset by a crowd of importunate sovereigns, some of whom had already

laid the foundations of regal glory, and expected to become royally drunk at the hospitable house of His Honor. The rush was tremendous; the tables were taken by storm, the bottles emptied in a moment. Confusion, noise, and quarreling ensued, until the mayor with the assistance of the police cleared the house and locked the doors. . . .²⁶

By the 1830's New York had become a constitutional democracy--people had triumphed over property. But probably more important than the legal changes which democratized politics was the less tangible transformation of mode or temper which affected political life. Politics in this period became increasingly a question of creating a popular image and of flattering the common man. The self-made professional politician replaced the high-minded man of wealth as the typical political figure. In New York this new brand of politician was most influentially represented by the Democrat Martin Van Buren and the Anti-Mason and later Whig Thurlow Weed. These men depended for their success on highly disciplined party organizations which could gain wide popular support. Candidates were put up because of their broad appeal; parades, picnics, and fanfare became essential to political life; popular issues were seized upon and adopted as part of party platforms. All this created a new political atmosphere in which a frontier military figure like Jackson could become a national hero, while a person with the stiff reticence of an Adams became a political anachronism.



Ironically just when political parties came to play such a significant role in American life their ideological differences became less important. From 1830 to the present no major American party has openly questioned the basic tenets of democracy. Even a conservative Whig journal admitted in 1836 that universal white male suffrage was beyond argument in America.²⁷ At a time when the English Chartists were considered extremely radical for advocating universal manhood suffrage, the ballot, short Parliaments, and paid membership, these things were considered past the point of questioning in America. Party divisions in the three decades prior to the Civil War occurred over particular issues such as protection vs. free trade, states' rights vs. a strong Federal Government, internal improvements, slavery, and immigration--but these issues were fought out within a broadly democratic framework. No aspiring politician after 1830 dared to oppose equal political rights, and henceforth all parties claimed to represent "the people."²⁸

Aristocracy was greatly weakened in the realm of politics by the triumph of democracy and the reliance on popular support by both major parties. No party was the organ of the "better" classes as the Tories were in England or as the Federalist had been to some measure in the first decades of the New Republic. Publicly aristocracy was simply not recognized. To be labelled an "aristocrat" or even a "gentleman" became a political handicap, and upper-



class persons were coming to realize that if they were to achieve public office and political power they must at least give lip service to the sacred shibboleths of democracy and cater to the will of the people.

This was best illustrated in the presidential election of 1840, when the Whig party, carefully guided by the New York political boss Thurlow Weed, ran the first truly modern campaign. Every attempt was made to depict the aging General William Henry Harrison, the hero of Tippecanoe who was descended from one of the first families of Virginia and who lived in a fine house along the Ohio, as a man of the people. Taking the Log Cabin and Hard Cider symbols from an anti-Whig article slurring Harrison, the Whigs used these to great effect. Cabins were erected, hard cider was served, picnics, conventions, song fests, and other circus-like means were used to sell Harrison to the people. The main theme of the Whigs in attacking the Democratic incumbent Van Buren was that he was an aristocrat, living luxuriously in the White House at the people's expense. One campaign pamphlet, entitled the "Regal Splendor of the President's Palace," pictured the President as eating French cuisine off gold plates while resting on a "Turkish divan." A popular Whig campaign song went:

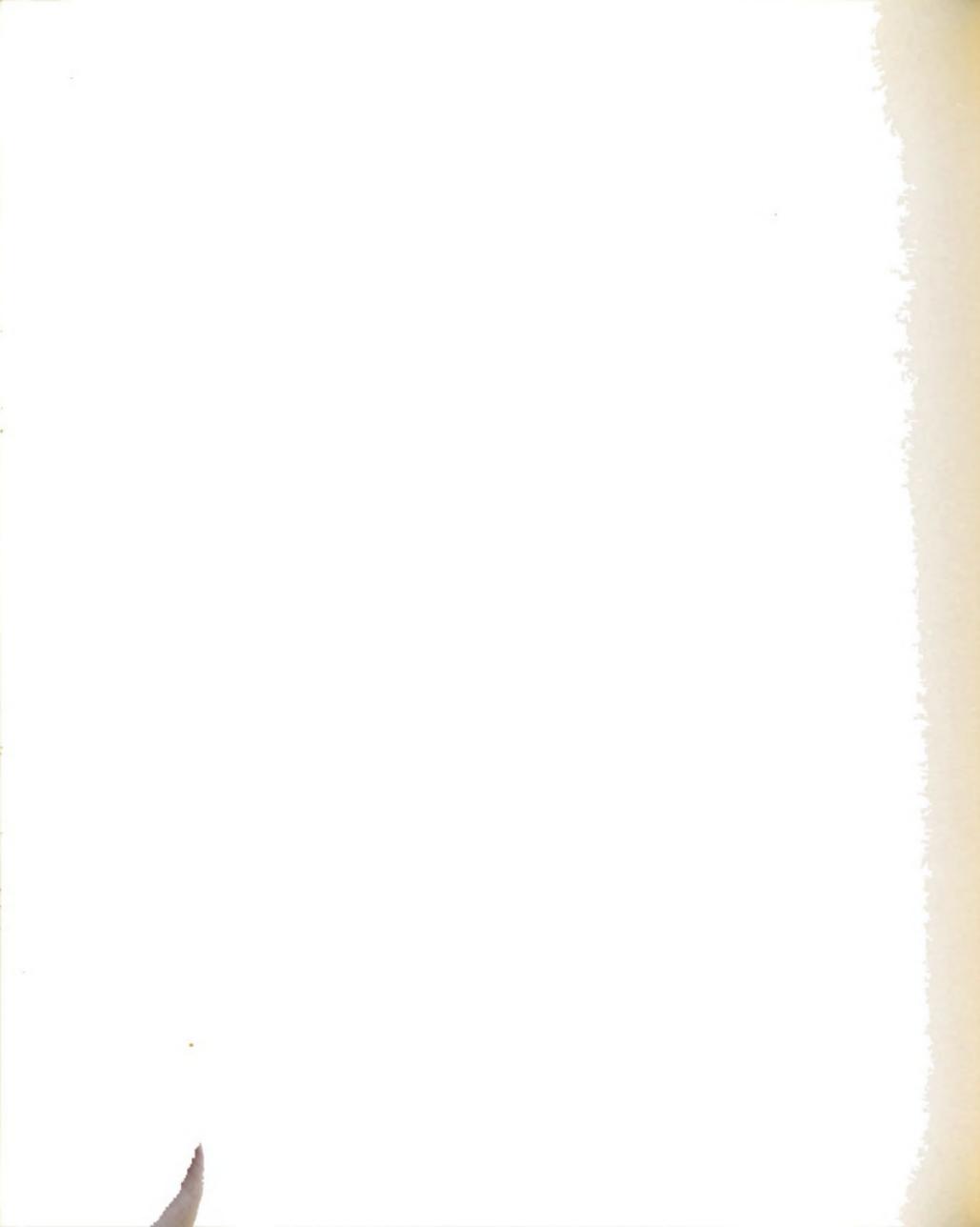
Let Van from his coolers of silver drink wine,
 And lounge on his cushioned setee,
 Our man on a buckeye bench can recline,
 Content with hard cider is he.²⁹

This sort of campaigning was effective. The voting turnout was immense. Over 800,000 more votes were cast than in the 1836 election. Anti-aristocratic feeling, with a good deal of help from the depression of 1837, swamped New York's political Magician.

Dixon Wecter, the historian of American Society, called the 1830's the "low water-mark of official Society in American"--formal manners were in eclipse. President Jackson provided his dinner guests with two forks, one silver and one steel, they could take their choice. Jackson himself preferred steel.³⁰ The President had become the chief symbol of the popular will, and if he was to retain his power he acted in accordance with the mandates of the people.

Numerous Americans of high social standing simply withdrew from politics altogether, disdaining to contend with the all powerful commoner-constituents. "At the present day," Tocqueville observed,

the more affluent classes of society are so entirely removed from the direction of political affairs in the United States, that wealth, far from conferring a right to the exercise of power, is rather an obstacle than a means of attaining to it. The wealthy members of the community abandon the lists, through unwillingness to contend, and frequently to contend in vain, against the poorest classes of their fellow-citizens. They concentrate all their enjoyments in the privacy of their homes, where they occupy a rank which cannot be assumed in public; and they constitute a private society in the State, which has its own tastes and its own pleasures.³¹

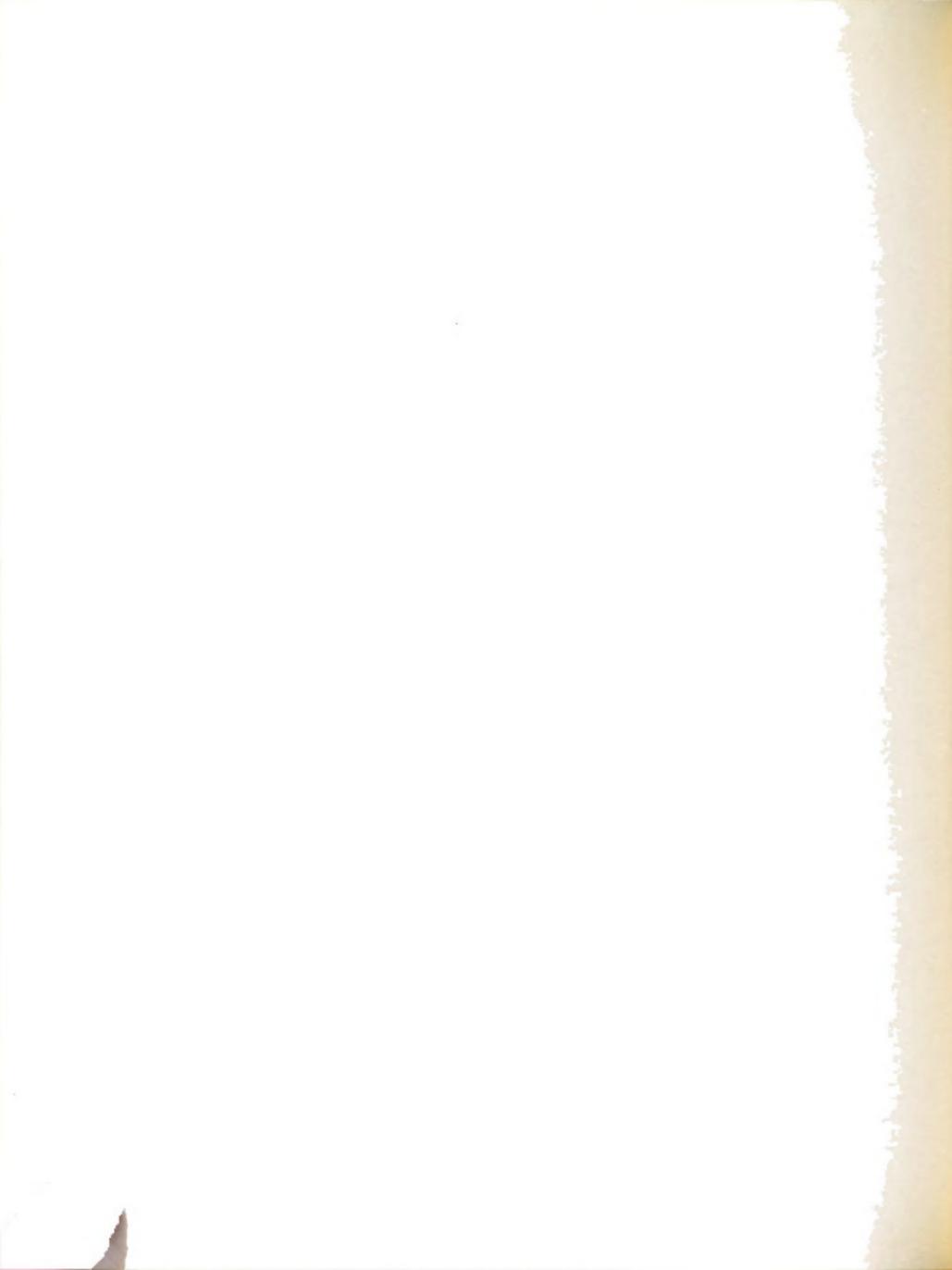


Unable to resist the forces of democracy by legitimate political means, wealthy citizens often became bitter and, as one contemporary wrote, "frankly expressed . . . their contempt for the government and institutions of America."³²

III

This anti-political bias on the part of the well-to-do was not just sour grapes; as in the later Gilded Age there were strong economic motives which kept enterprising persons away from politics. Far richer rewards were gained from commerce or industry. Furthermore, retaining political favor was precarious; one could be unseated by the electoral whims of the capricious public. Even holding high public office was not a guarantee that one would be considered of high social standing. Great wealth, on the other hand, regardless of how gained, virtually was such a guarantee. It was not uncommon to regard politicians as second rate persons unfit for the business world.³³ But, whatever reasons the wealthy gave for shunning politics, there was no denying that the people had gained an equality in this realm just as they had in the social sphere.

In his essay on People of Plenty, David Potter maintains that political democracies depend for their success on the existence of an economic surplus and a wide distribution of goods. Without this, the promise of that equality which democracy implies would remain unfulfilled, since there would



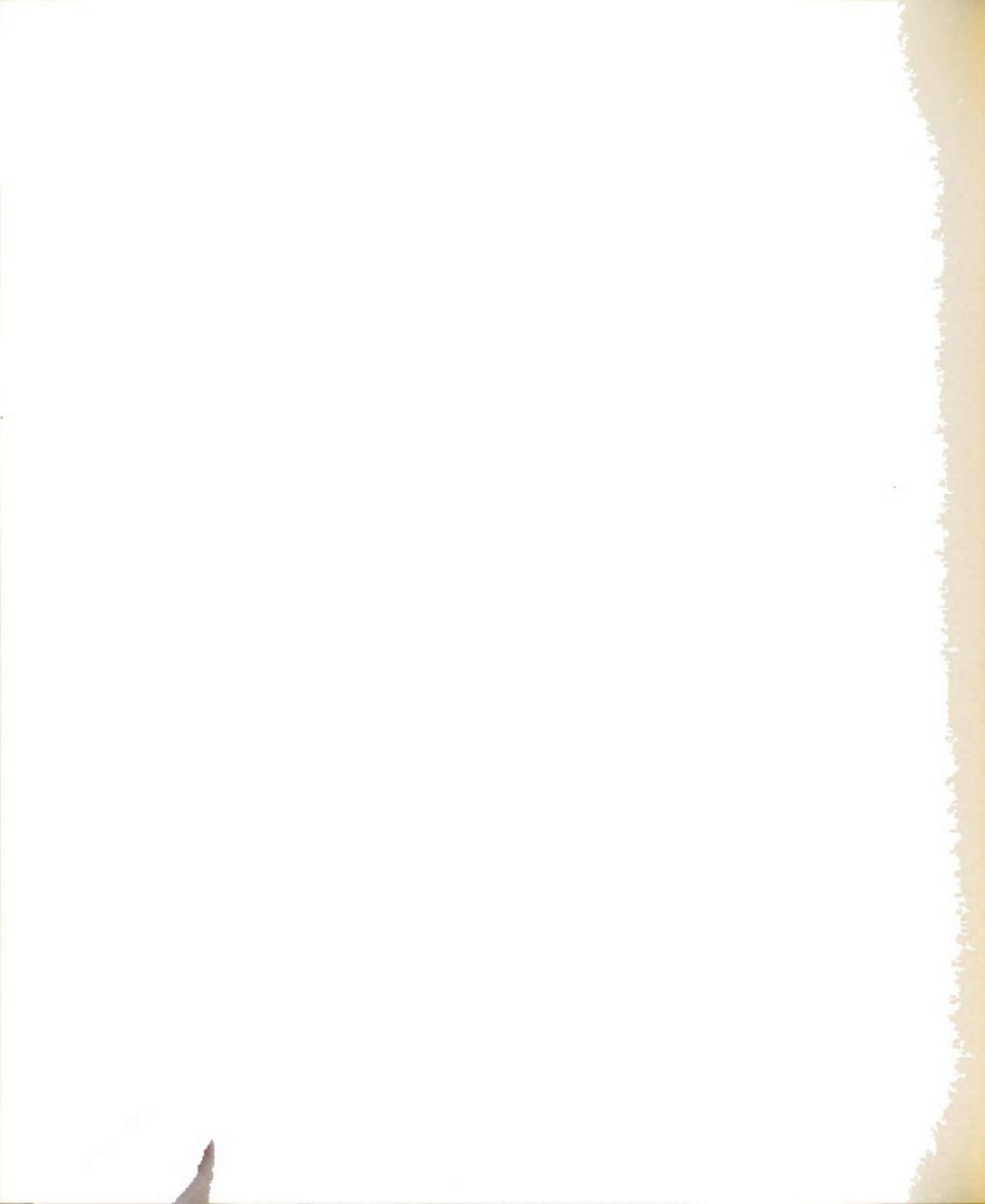
be little possibility of improving one's situation.³⁴ America in the 1830's had economic abundance sufficient to make advancement seem not merely possible but quite the normal process of affairs. The traveller Basil Hall noted that here "there is plenty of employment; so that, by the exercise of a moderate share of diligence, the young couple may swell their establishment to any extent they please. . . ." ³⁵ The most important single factor in shaping and sustaining American equality and democracy was this accessibility of wealth.

Society in the Jacksonian era was optimistic and restless. Almost to a man Americans felt that the future would be better than the past, just as democracy was better than monarchy, and steam better than sail. Civilization was progressing and America was in the vanguard. This optimism was shown in energetic enterprises of a hundred kinds--from the reforming of drunkards to the laying of railroads. All was carried out with great haste--meals were gobbled with a rapidity that amazed (and disgusted) foreign visitors; great canals were dug through unpeopled wilds; huge hotels were constructed in towns that were little more than dreams. Behind all this seemingly ceaseless activity was the desire to improve one's position. "The first thing which strikes a traveller in the United States," wrote Tocqueville, "is the innumerable multitude of those who seek to throw off their original condition. . . . No Americans are devoid of



a yearning desire to rise. . . ."36 The average family had, or expected to have, its own home; food, drink, clothing, and other necessities were to be had in abundance. Men generally looked forward to becoming their own boss; women desired to have servants; and both men and women expected that their children would be better educated and financially better off than themselves.

Economic opportunity took many forms. One factor was the abundance of cheap lands. In New York State, except in the cities and along the route of the canal, fertile lands were readily available at reasonable prices.³⁷ Land speculators had gained control of most of the unsettled lands in the western, central and northern parts of the state during the first two decades after Independence. English, Dutch, and French capitalists as well as native investors purchased sizeable tracts, and in this way millions of acres came under the control of relatively few land jobbers. Hoping to profit by the rise in land values, these speculators subdivided their tracts and often built roads, mills, and schools in an attempt to attract settlers. However, few of the great land magnates realized the profits they had expected. Some like Robert Morris and Alexander Macomb, two of the largest landholders, went bankrupt. Other speculators like the English syndicate headed by Sir William Pulteney barely got back their initial investments. The conservative bankers of the Holland Land Company, who controlled most of the far western



part of the state, realized about 5 percent per year from their investment, but they met considerable resistance from the debtor farmers who had settled on their lands. Finally in 1835, after a mob had sacked one of the company offices and debtors throughout the Holland purchase area had refused to pay their outstanding debts, these Dutch bankers sold their holdings.³⁸

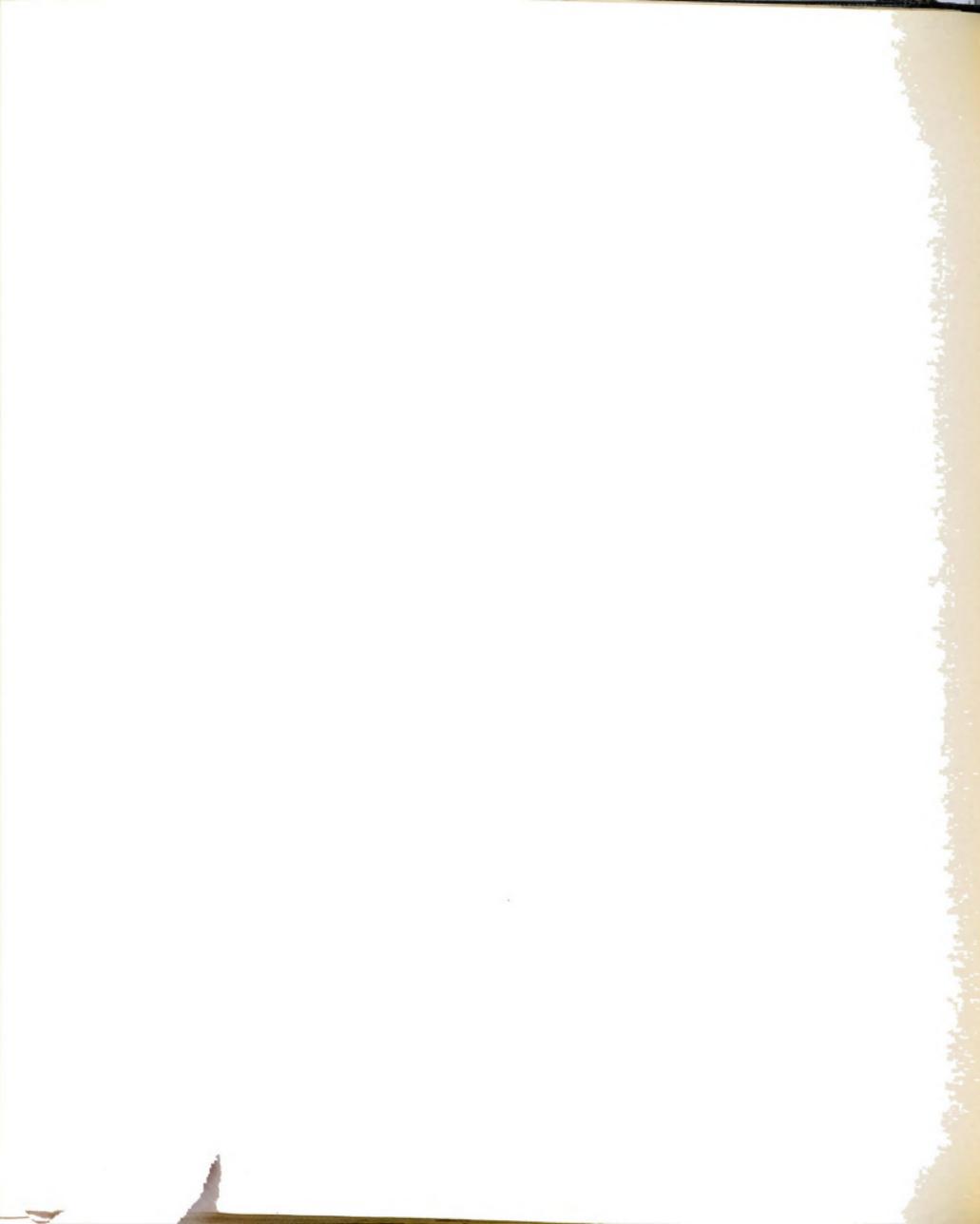
By the 1830's thousands of freehold farmers had come into possession of their own lands. Land speculators who retained large tracts were eager to sell parcels of property to bona fide settlers, and on many occasions generous credit terms were granted.³⁹ The ready availability of land mitigated against the establishment of a landed aristocracy. Great rural estates were, of course, still extant, especially in the valleys of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, but these were the exceptions. Most farmers were their own masters, and small farms worked by a single family, with perhaps the help of one or two hired hands, were the general rule.

Farmers were sturdy and independent as American tradition would have them, but they were also conservative, poorly educated, overworked, underpaid, and living barely above a subsistence level. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century farmers were turning more to raising particular cash crops and, gradually, to improving agricultural techniques. The average farmer's profits nevertheless remained small. While more persons were engaged in agriculture



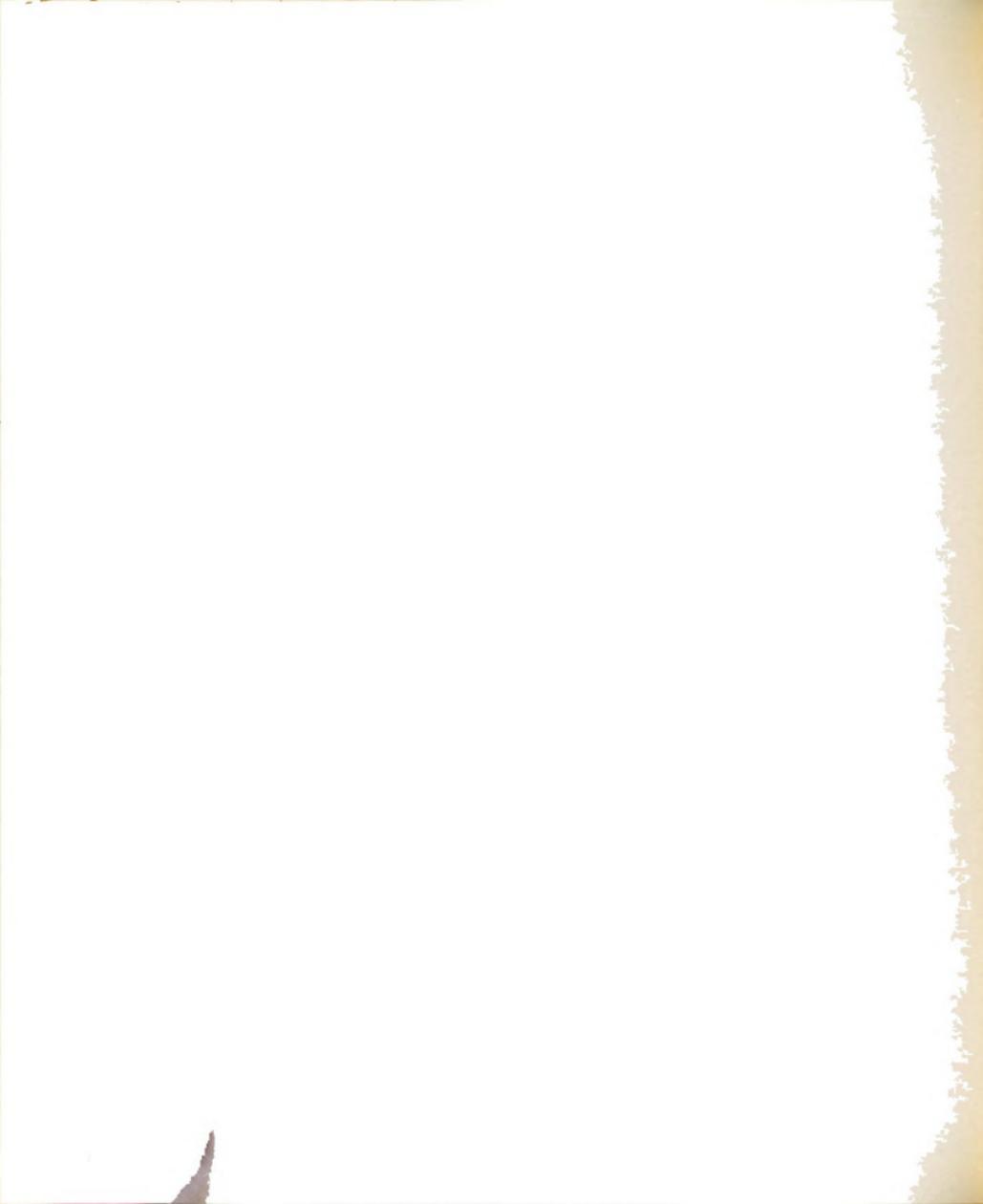
than in any other occupation, many ambitious Americans began to turn to more rapidly rewarding occupations in the area of commerce and manufacturing. Tocqueville noted this trend. "The cultivation of the ground," he wrote, "promises an almost certain result of his [the farmer's] exertions, but a slow one. . . . Agriculture is therefore only suited to those who have already large superfluous wealth, or to those whose penury bids them only seek a bare subsistence. . . . Thus democracy leads men to prefer one kind of labour to another; and whilst it diverts them from agriculture, it encourages their taste for commerce and manufactures."⁴⁰

The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 opened up new vistas to many New Yorkers. For some it was merely a better system for transporting goods to market, but to the imaginative and ambitious it was a stimulus to new enterprises. The canal, Levi Beardsley recalled, "enlarged the views, and removed many prejudices against internal improvements, so that men began to believe things possible which they did not fully comprehend. . . ."⁴¹ The success of the Erie and other innovations and improvements in transportation gave to the ordinary American a new optimism and spirit of enterprise. Society was in a state of flux, or, as it seemed to many contemporaries, in a state of chaos. All around them people saw examples of successful individuals who had amassed small fortunes through shrewd investments in commerce, manufacturing, real estate, or any number of other projects.



The spirit of the times was one of risk and gambling with the great goal being the accumulation of riches. Americans considered wealth a sufficient enough end in itself to sanction various shady practices and even to praise these questionable acts as "sharp" dealings or as examples of "Yankee ingenuity." Wealth was a symbol of status in America, and while money was not the only criterion of social standing, it was the most easily recognized and therefore the most important. It was largely the search for wealth that made Americans the most mobile people in the world.⁴² "In the United States," wrote Tocqueville, "a man builds a house to spend his latter years in it, and he sells it before the roof is on: he plants a garden, and lets it just as the trees are coming into bearing: he brings a field into tillage, and leaves other men to gather the crops: he embraces a profession, and gives it up: he settles in a place, which he soon afterwards leaves to carry his changeable longings elsewhere."⁴³ America was an open society with an expanding economy. Distinctions of rank were not clear-cut, legal privileges were scarce, hereditary property was subdivided, and education and freedom were widely diffused. As a result the struggle for wealth was the dominating passion.

"Rags to riches" was not an Horatio Alger fairy tale; it was an accepted truth. Poor-boy-made-good examples abounded. John Jacob Astor, probably the richest man in



Amercia, started out as an impoverished immigrant; while President Jackson's own career was an example of what could be accomplished by an energetic and enterprising American. The Jacksons and Astors of society were not thought of as extraordinary persons; they were merely examples of what any American could achieve with the right amounts of pluck and luck.

The availability of wealth and the common belief that anyone could succeed colored the American notion of equality. Poor persons often ranted against the "moneyed aristocracy" but seldom with a class bitterness. Almost no one wanted to rid the nation of inequality by taking from the rich and giving to the poor; instead people wanted the right to become rich themselves. Equality was not looked upon as a levelling process; it meant equality of opportunity in the race for riches. As one writer put it: "True republicanism requires that every man shall have an equal chance--that every man shall be free to become as unequal as he can."⁴⁴ Equality meant that all men could become gentlemen; not that all gentlemen would be eliminated. This gave Americans a dynamic view of class structure. There was a strong awareness of class in the Jacksonian era, but class levels were regarded as rungs to be climbed rather than as permanent ranks. This is why mobility and change were such important aspects of American character. Michael Chevalier noted that "in general, the American is little disposed to

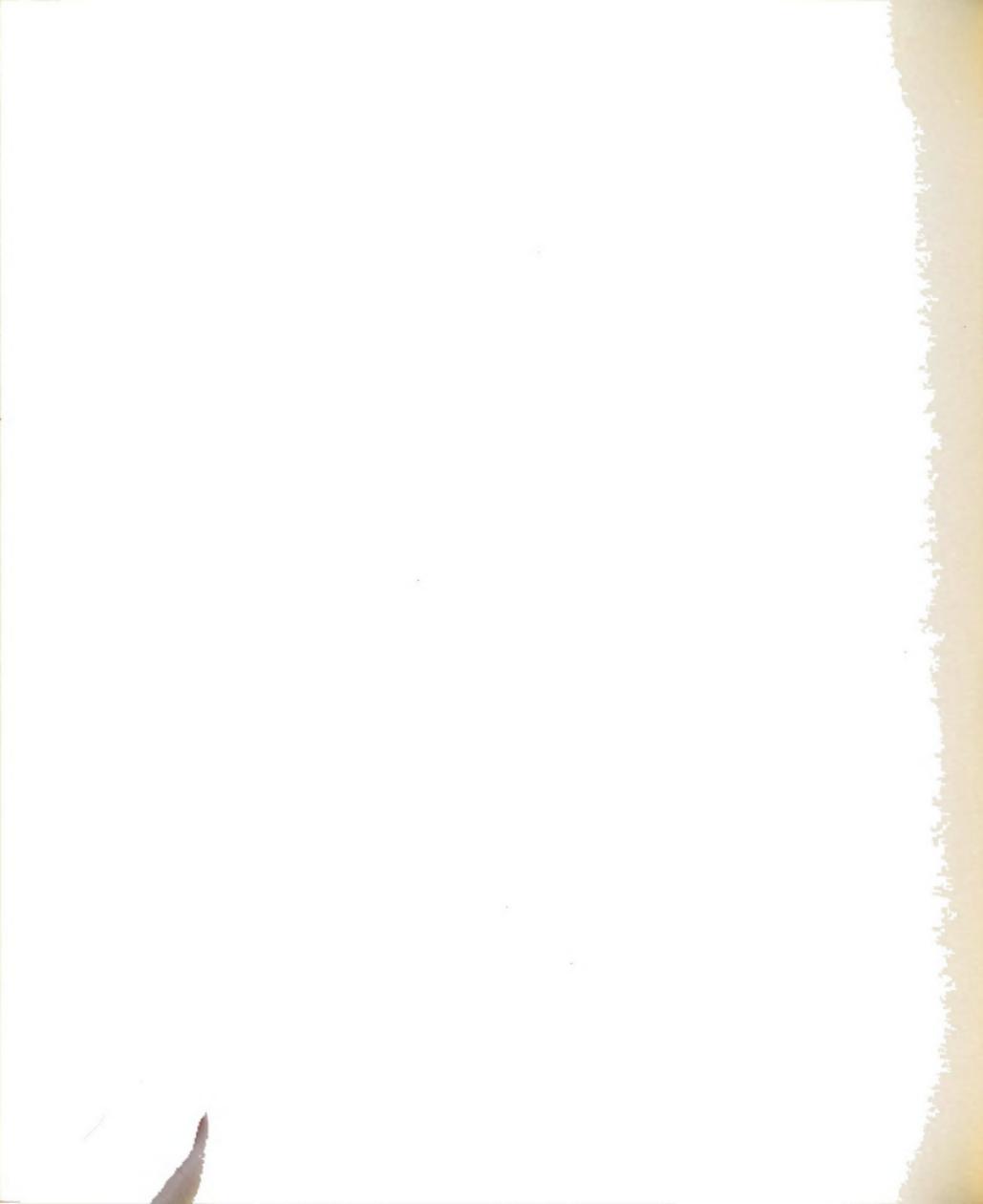


be contented, his idea of equality is to be inferior to none, but he endeavors to rise in only one direction. His only means, like his only thought is to subdue the material world. . . ."45

Unfortunately, in the pursuit of wealth failures were as frequent as fortunes, and for many the American dream of wealth became a nightmare of frustrated aspirations. Even successful individuals were goaded on by a mild discontent; few were satisfied with past accomplishments. In reflecting on American life a somewhat disaffected contemporary wrote that:

Every one is tugging, trying, scheming to advance-- to get ahead. It is a great scramble, in which all are troubled and none are satisfied. In Europe, the poor man, as a rule, knows that he must remain poor, and he submits to his lot, and tries to make the best of it. . . . Not so in America. Every other little ragged boy dreams of being President or millionaire. The dream may be a pleasant one while it lasts, but what of the disappointing reality? What of the excited, restless, feverish life spent in the pursuit of phantoms?46

Similarly in reading Tocqueville's analysis of American society there emerges the picture of an enterprising people who were extremely anxious, restless, impatient and unstable. "Democratic institutions," he wrote, "awaken and foster a passion for equality which they can never entirely satisfy." People felt that they had the opportunity of rising to the level of their fellow citizens and they were disappointed by their failure to reach any "level."47 Like a mule pursuing an outstretched carrot, Americans constantly

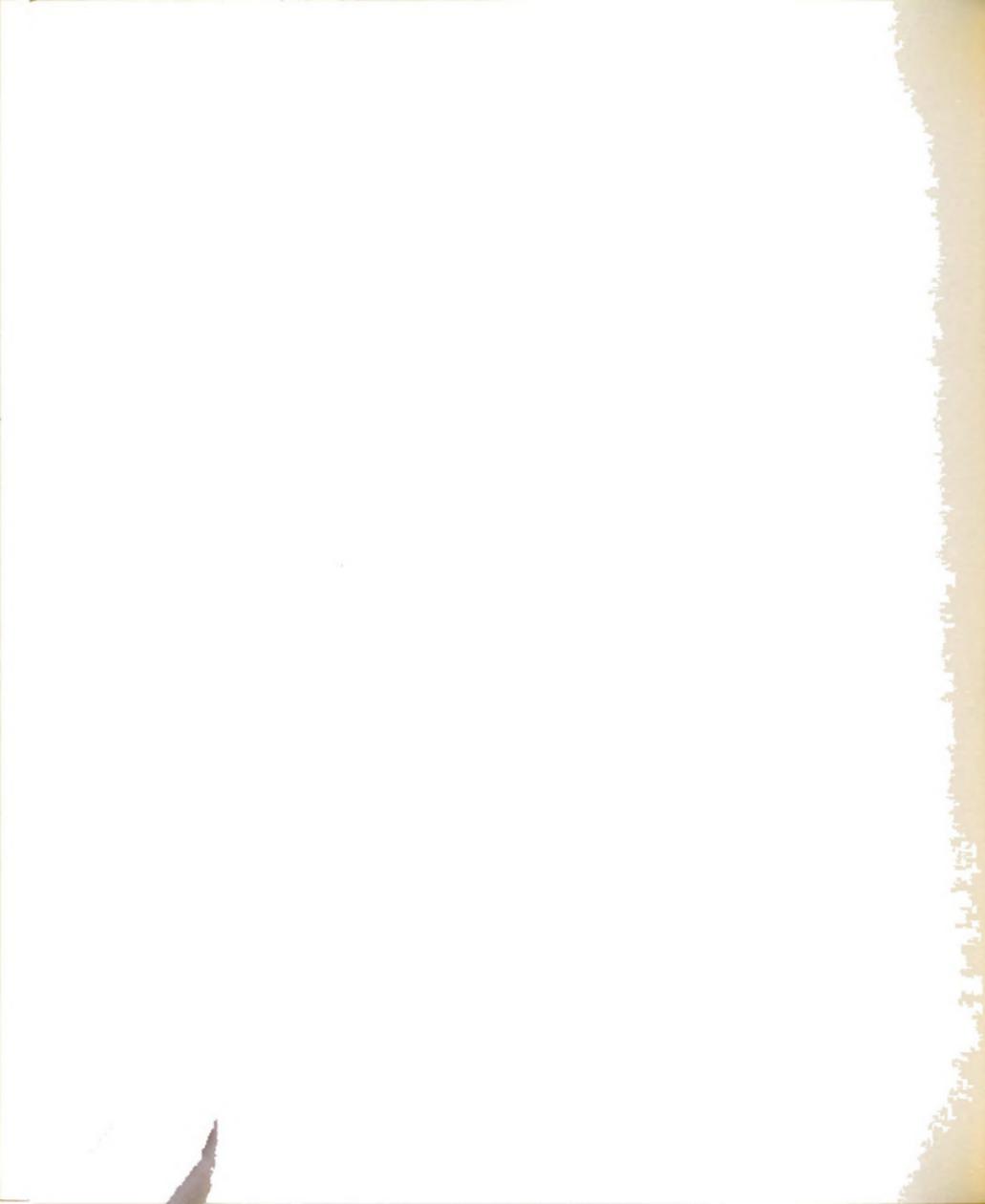


sought an equality which

perpetually retires from before them, yet without hiding itself from their sight, and in retiring draws them on. At every moment they think they are about to grasp it; it escapes from their hold. They are near enough to see its charms, but too far off to enjoy them; and before they have fully tasted its delights, they die. . . . In democratic ages enjoyments are more intense than in the ages of aristocracy, and especially the number of those who partake in them is larger: but, on the other hand, it must be admitted that man's hopes and his desires are oftener blasted, the soul is more stricken and perturbed, and care itself more keen.⁴⁸

Enough people advanced in American society to give the impression that this was the natural process, but for those who failed to progress or who fell back into poverty there was no excuse or justification; their failure was taken personally. In Europe a poor man by birth would have had little reason to feel a compulsion to succeed; his position was relatively fixed by class standards. Here, however, where class labels were scorned, the poor man could not blame his lack of success on society--he alone was at fault. Even well-to-do individuals who did not increase their wealth at a reasonable rate often considered themselves failures. Success was not a fixed goal; it was advancement to a higher level. Therefore, a person's achievement was measured less by what he possessed than by what he had gained.

However, the very achievement of certain individuals in various enterprises made future success for those who had not yet arrived more difficult. The three decades from 1830 to the Civil War were a time of major economic and social



change. In New York during this period society became increasingly aristocratic. A wealthy class of capitalists emerged more clearly set off from the rest of society than any "aristocracy" of colonial times. At the same time mass immigration and industrialization created a more or less permanent proletariat. But before examining the factors that made New York society more stratified it will be useful to scrutinize the state's lower and upper classes during the age of Jackson.



FOOTNOTES

¹Manual for Emigrants to America (London, 1832),
p. 62.

²On the lack of spread between the rich and poor in
New York State see: S. H. Collins, The Emigrant's Guide to
the United States of America (London, 1830), pp. 22-23, 114.

³Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve (2 vols.,
New York, 1961), I, lxvii.

⁴Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States,
John William Ward, ed. (Garden City, New York, 1961), pp.
182-83.

⁵Francis J. Grund, Aristocracy in America (New York,
1959), pp. 29-30.

⁶Thomas Cather, Voyage to America (New York, 1961),
p. 103.

⁷See James Stuart, Three Years in North America (2nd
ed., 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1833), II, 182; Frances Trollope,
Domestic Manners of the Americans, Donald Smalley, ed. (New
York, 1960), pp. 392-95.

⁸James Fenimore Cooper, The America Democrat (New York,
1956), p. 154.

⁹The Picture of New-York and Stranger's Guide to the Commercial Metropolis of the United States (New York, 1828), pp. 364-65.

¹⁰Francis J. Grund, The Americans in Their Moral, Social, and Political Relations (2 vols., London, 1837), II, 143; William Cobbett, A Year's Residence in the United States (3 vols., New York, 1818), I, 201. There is no recent study of domestic service in this period. The best general work on the subject is the older study by Lucy Maynard Salmon, Domestic Service (New York, 1897).

¹¹Robert Riegal, Young America, 1830-1840 (Norman, Oklahoma, 1949), p. 177; Arthur Train, Jr., The Story of Everyday Things (New York, 1941), p. 288.

¹²John Fowler, Journal of a Tour in the State of New York in the Year 1830 (London, 1831), p. 218; Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828 (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1829), I, 142, II, 156-57.

¹³The Laws of Etiquette (Philadelphia, 1836), p. 89.

¹⁴Harriet Martineau, Society in America (2 vols., London, 1837), II, 63; Nelson M. Blake, A History of American Life and Thought (New York, 1963), p. 182; Marcus Cunliffe, The Nation Takes Shape, 1789-1837 (Chicago, 1959), pp. 175-76.

¹⁵Riegal, Young America, p. 11; Carl R. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York, 1927), pp. 331-32.

16 Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, pp. 102-05.

17 H. E. Scudder, ed., Recollections of Samuel Breck (Philadelphia, 1877), pp. 275-76.

18 A good account of the spread and triumph of evangelical religion in New York is Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-Over District (Ithaca, New York, 1950); see also: Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Boston, 1958), pp. 14, 81-82, 96-99, 105-109, 135.

19 Grund, Aristocracy, pp. 25-26.

20 Quoted in William Cobbett, The Emigrant's Guide (London, 1830), p. 91.

21 F. B. Hough, Census of Electors of the State of New York (Albany, 1857), p. x; see also Chilton Williamson, American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860 (Princeton, 1960), p. 197.

22 Williamson, American Suffrage, p. 195.

23 N. H. Carter, W. L. Stone, and M. T. C. Gould, Reports of the Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of 1821 (Albany, 1821), pp. 219-22; the best account of Kent's role in the convention is found in John Theodore Horton, James Kent: a Study in Conservatism (New York, 1939), pp. 243-63.

24 Quoted in David M. Ellis, et al., A Short History of New York State (Ithaca, New York, 1957), p. 147.

²⁵The best account of the New York Constitutional Convention is still Dixon Ryan Fox's The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York (New York, 1919), pp. 229-70; two brief but valuable accounts of the democratic reforms in New York are found in John Bach McMaster, The Acquisition of the Political, Social and Industrial Rights of Man in America (New York, 1961), pp. 68-73; and Gilman Ostrander, The Rights of Man in America, 1606-1861 (Columbia, Mo., 1960), pp. 163-67.

²⁶Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851 (New York, 1936), pp. 235-36.

²⁷American Quarterly Review, XX (September, 1836), 208.

²⁸The English visitor Charles Mackay made this observation in the 1850's in his book Life and Liberty in America (New York, 1859), p. 304; see also: Williamson, American Suffrage, pp. 281-82; Lee Benson, The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case (Princeton, 1961), p. 10.

²⁹Quoted in Robert G. Gunderson, The Log-Cabin Campaign (Lexington, Kentucky, 1957), p. 107; see also: Dixon Wector, The Saga of American Society (New York, 1937), pp. 95-96.

³⁰Saga of American Society, pp. 92-94.

³¹Democracy in America, I, 202.

³²Grund, Aristocracy, pp. 171, 264; see also: Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, pp. 164-65.

³³Grund, Aristocracy, pp. 13-14, 210.

³⁴People of Plenty (Chicago, 1954), pp. 114-16.

³⁵Travels in North America, II, 136-37.

³⁶Democracy in America, II, 290.

³⁷Collins, Emigrant's Guide, p. 94.

³⁸Ellis, et al., Short History of New York, pp. 150-62.

³⁹Alexander C. Flick, ed., History of the State of New York (10 vols., New York, 1933-37), V, 162-72.

⁴⁰Democracy in America, II, 184-85; Riegel, Young America, p. 7.

⁴¹Reminiscences (New York, 1852), p. 219; the social impact of the Erie Canal is discussed in Benson, The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy, p. 13; and Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, V, 297.

⁴²Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, pp. 3-5, 160; Cunliffe, The Nation Takes Shape, pp. 163-64.

⁴³Democracy in America, II, 162.

⁴⁴How to Behave (New York, 1856), p. 124.

⁴⁵Society and Manners, pp. 261-62; see also Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, p. 63.



⁴⁶Thomas L. Nichols, Forty Years of American Life, 1821-1861 (New York, 1937), p. 195.

⁴⁷Tocqueville, Democracy in America, I, 230; see also: Grund, Aristocracy, p. 54.

⁴⁸Democracy in America, II, 164-65; an excellent study of Tocqueville's analysis of Jacksonian society is Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion (New York, 1960), pp. 33-56; indispensable in using Tocqueville as a source is the work by George W. Pierson, Tocqueville and Beaumont in America (New York, 1938).

CHAPTER 2

LABOR IN JACKSONIAN NEW YORK

That our citizens are yearly departing from the simplicity of our republican institutions, is a complaint made by many whose opinions deserve attention, and is evinced by the increasing arrogance of those termed the higher classes, and the servility of those denominated the lower, which must be evident to all who are accustomed to observe what is passing around them.

--The Working Man's Advocate,
New York, February 20, 1830

I

Leisure was a luxury in which few persons indulged in Jacksonian New York. Most men, including the wealthy, made money by their own toil. Even gentlemen inheriting sufficient wealth to live comfortably felt a compulsion to engage in some sort of useful, and usually financially rewarding, enterprise. Work was not viewed as a bar to gentility. To be totally idle, on the other hand, was regarded as being virtually outside of society. Because of this attitude labor was not looked on with scorn.¹

American respect for labor in the early 1830's was conditioned by the fact that this country up to that time had never had an excess of workers. This scarcity of laborers made for comparatively higher wages here than workers received



in Europe. Numerous foreign travellers commented upon this factor. In 1830, S. H. Collins, an English author of a guide book for prospective emigrants to America, wrote that the United States was the best country in the world for workers; here they would earn four or five times what they could in Europe. This was a highly exaggerated estimate, but it certainly was true that a worker was generally paid more here than in Britain or any other European country.²

The French traveller Michael Chevalier on arriving in New York in 1833 was struck by the prosperous appearance of the laboring classes:

The United States are certainly the land of promise for the worker and the peasant. What a contrast between our Europe and this America! After landing in New York, I thought every day was Sunday, for the whole population that throngs Broadway seemed to be arrayed in their Sunday's best. None of those countenances ghastly with the privations or the foul air of Paris; nothing like our wretched scavengers, our ragmen, and corresponding classes of the other sex. Every man was warmly clad in an outer garment; every woman had her cloak and bonnet of the latest Paris fashion.

Chevalier went on to relate the story of an Irishman, recently arrived in America, who showed his employer a letter he had just written to his family. On reading it the employer exclaimed, "But, Patrick, why do you say that you have meat three times a week, when you have it three times a day?" "Why?" replied Pat, "because if I told them that, they would never believe me."³

Other Europeans gave similar testimony. John Parks, an English immigrant working as an apprentice carpenter in

New York, wrote in the late twenties that "the labouring people live by the best of provisions; there is no such thing as a poor industrious man in New York."⁴ "Mechanics of all kinds in this country," observed an Irish gentleman, "would do remarkably well."⁵

Comparatively speaking, foreign observers found that farm workers also fared better in the New World than in the Old. Contrasting the conditions under which farm hands worked in England and New York State in the late thirties, James Silk Buckingham found that the latter had all the advantages. New York farm laborers earned nearly \$1.00 per day, half again as much as their English counterparts. They paid no tithes; they were not harassed by game laws; they had the advantage of free schools for their children; they lived in much more substantial cottages. "The consequence is, that the farm-labourers and their families are all well-fed, well-dressed, well-educated in all the ordinary elements of knowledge, intelligent in conversation, agreeable in manners, and as superior to the corresponding class of farm-labourers in England as all these advantages can indicate."⁶

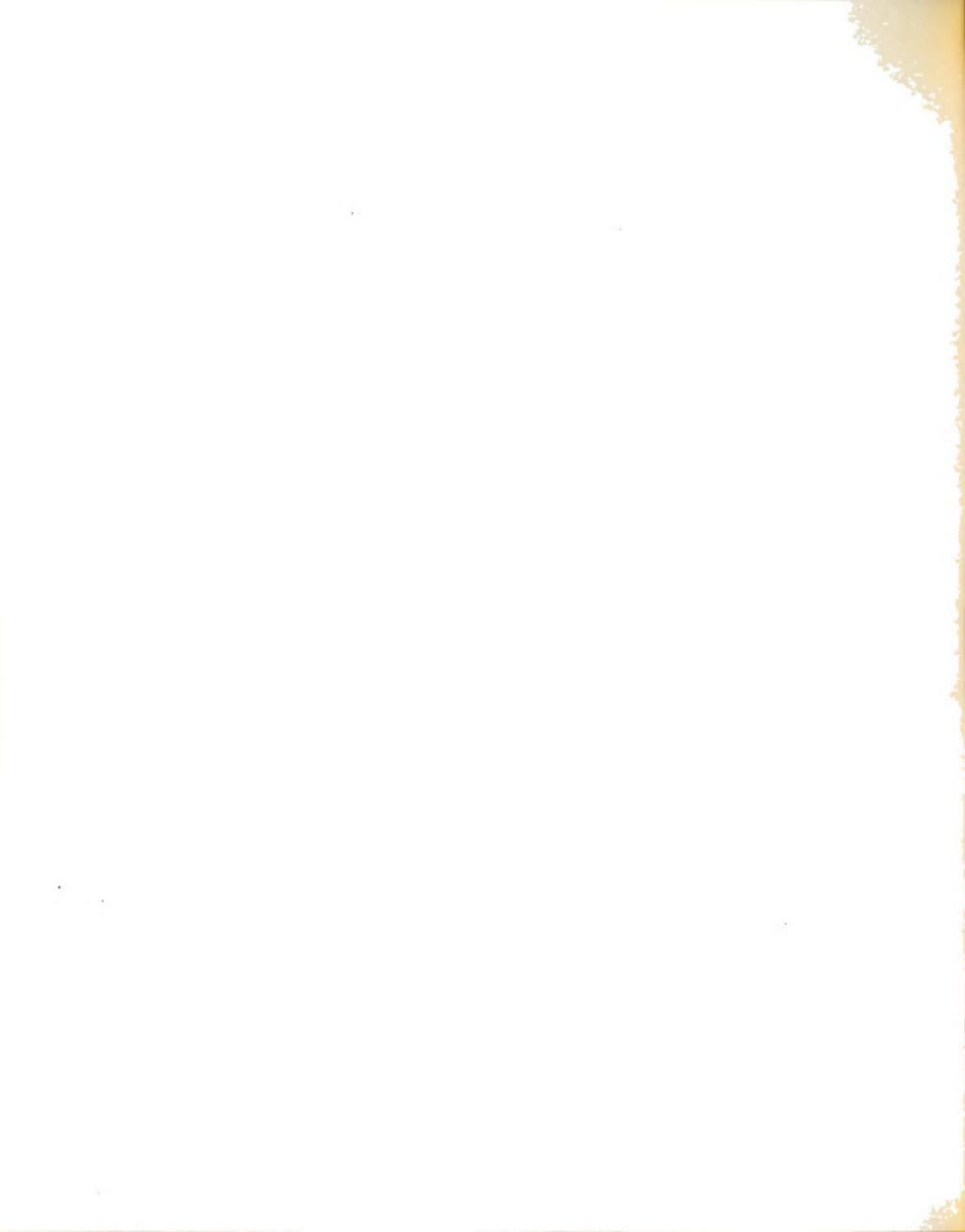
The lack of beggars, thieves, and persons on poor relief in the towns and cities of America also impressed foreign visitors familiar with the impoverished classes of Europe. An English immigrant residing in a western New York village wrote in 1828: "I have been poor master of this town

for many years, and I find it is a rare thing for a resident to become an annual town charge. In the circle of my acquaintance I know of no one who takes the trouble of locking or barring their doors by night, for thieving is so uncommon that they think it entirely useless and unnecessary."⁷

The accounts of foreign travellers attest that working conditions in Jacksonian America were better than in Europe. However, even the most thorough of these analyses tend toward superficiality and overgeneralization. In discussing working conditions foreign authors shed light upon the broad differences between Europe and America, but they do not adequately treat the position of the American worker in relation to other classes of society. Already by the 1830's class lines were tightening while working conditions were worsening in the face of economic changes that were radically altering American society.

II

Before examining what working conditions actually existed in Jacksonian New York it is necessary to analyze what groups composed the working classes. Workers themselves in the period made a broad distinction between the "productive" and the "nonproductive" classes. The productive classes included all those whose work had tangible utility, or, in the words of the New York Workingman's Party, "all that support society by useful employment."⁸ The term "workingman"



was used synonymously with "productive" classes, and was applied to small merchants, clerks, and subprofessionals as well as to more common laborers. A more particular term in currency during the thirties (and indeed during the two following decades) was that of "mechanic." It generally referred to skilled artisans working at a craft within the apprenticeship system. Capitalists, speculators, bankers, lawyers, importers and exporters, auctioneers, absentee owners, political enemies, and others more or less removed from direct manufacture composed, in the eyes of the workers, the nonproductive classes. In some respects these broad divisions separated labor from capital. But this separation was never sharply drawn in Jacksonian New York. Workers did not like to think of themselves as a distinct class, especially the skilled artisans or mechanics.⁹

In 1830 the percentage of wage workers was small, and few of those in this category intended to remain so. The English factory system with its clear-cut division between employer and employee was in its infancy in America. Only in the cotton textile industry was this system mature. Those making up the bulk of the wage workers included unskilled laborers, largely immigrants employed at heavy digging or construction work, farm hands, domestic servants, women, working either in their homes or in small factories, and skilled mechanics employed by master craftsmen. These workers, with the possible exception of some unskilled

laborers, looked forward to an independent status as farm owners, shopkeepers, master craftsmen employing their own workers, or, if women, to becoming the wives of successful men.¹⁰

Not all wage workers, of course, were able to realize this ambition of achieving an independent station. This became increasingly true as transportation improved, industry expanded, and a permanent wage earning class developed. Much of the history of labor between 1830 and 1860 could be written in terms of declining social mobility for workers and their reaction to this. Already by the late twenties laborers were becoming more class-conscious as their status deteriorated. Working conditions were worst at this time for unskilled laborers and for factory operatives who in New York State included many women and children. However, the first major awakening of workers to their special class interests, occurring in the late twenties, did not come as a reaction to the factory system. The labor movements arose primarily as a protest by skilled mechanics against economic changes that threatened their position in society.¹¹

Traditionally the apprenticeship system in which skilled mechanics were employed allowed for a good deal of vertical mobility. The various ranks from apprentice through journeyman to master were like rungs of a ladder to be climbed by the ambitious mechanic. Because of this there was not a sharp split between the employees and their



employers. The first unions, or "trade associations" as they were called, reflected this closeness. Organizations of artisans such as printers, bakers, tailors, cobblers, cordwainers, and carpenters flourished in New York and other cities and towns during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They often represented both journeymen and masters, and their functions included paying accident, sickness, and death benefits, promoting inventions and improvements, assisting young journeymen to become independent producers through loans, setting wages and prices, and judiciating in disputes between members. In short, a trade association was similar to a medieval guild, acting as a benevolent organization and as a regulatory power.¹²

Workers within this craft system did not think of themselves as mere wage earners. They sold a product, not their labor. The concept of a fair price and a fair wage prevailed. Generally masters and journeymen worked in the same small shop producing goods ordered for the local market.¹³

By the early twenties, however, new forces were breaking down this harmonious system, much to the detriment of the artisan. The revolutionary improvements in transportation, the growth of cities, and the enlargement of credit economically changed America. Canals, turnpikes, and later railways united the rapidly growing population, creating large markets for manufactured goods. The small craft shop of a master and his two or three journeymen and

apprentices could no longer adequately supply this type of market. To meet new needs industries expanded and came more under the control of the middleman--the merchant-capitalist.

The heyday of the merchant-capitalist was the period of transition between the era of handicraft and domestic production for a limited clientele and the emergence of the full scale factory system mass producing goods for broad distribution. The dates of this shift vary from industry to industry. In some enterprises such as textiles the factory system was dominant by the 1830's; whereas in the manufacture of clothing the factory did not surpass the output of tailors until the early 1850's. But generally speaking in New York the shift from handicraft to factory production took place in the two decades from 1820 to 1840, and it was in this period that the merchant-capitalist thrived.¹⁴

Essentially he was a middleman combining several functions. He bought and sold; he dealt with cash and credit. His chief interest was making money. He seldom owned a shop or a mill in which artisans were employed. He distributed raw materials and bought back the finished products. These in turn would be distributed and sold over an extensive area. To make his profit the merchant-capitalist depended on purchasing goods at the lowest price possible and selling them cheaply but in quantity.¹⁵

The effect of these middlemen on the apprenticeship system was to make the skill of the journeyman less important



and to make him less independent. Master craftsmen, owning their own shops, no longer made goods to order for a local market. To survive they were forced to sell directly to a merchant-capitalist at the latter's price. The merchant, who was himself often engaged in cutthroat competition with other capitalists, bought wherever goods were cheapest. Thus, to sell a product the local employer had to price his goods as low as any rival. Numerous tactics were used to decrease production costs, all of which were detrimental to the interests of skilled workers. One method of reducing costs was to encourage piece work. Instead of manufacturing an entire product such as a shoe or a table, several workers would be employed to do particular tasks. One might cut a leather pattern or a table leg. Another would sew or sand or nail. In this way production was speeded up while expenses were greatly reduced, though generally the finished product was not of as high a quality as that made by a single craftsman.

Another cost-reducing practice hurtful to the trained mechanic was the hiring of less skilled, and therefore cheaper, workers. This was possible since performing piece work did not require highly trained artisans. Employers began using the cheapest available labor sources--children, women, prisoners, recent immigrants, and unskilled laborers. Journeymen were no longer paid for the product they made; rather they received a daily wage. If they organized and demanded higher

pay, they were often dismissed. One practice employers used was to take on numerous apprentices and then drop them at the stage when they would normally have become journeymen at a higher salary.¹⁶

Under these pressures the apprenticeship system deteriorated. The growing power of the merchant-capitalist to control markets and set prices drove a wedge between masters and journeymen, employers and employees. The master was compelled in many instances to become a virtual sweat shop operator since his only profit was the difference between the price he received from the capitalist and that which he paid his workers. Those masters who attempted to maintain the old system and wages were soon forced out of business.

Skilled artisans reacted angrily to what they considered to be infringements of their rights. Pushed into the position of mere wage workers selling their labor and not a product, they became aware that their interests were antagonistic to those of their employers. As early as 1817, the New York printers society expelled a master on the grounds that "this society is a society of journeymen printers; and as the interests of the journeymen are separate and in some respects opposite to those of the employers, we deem it improper that they should have any voice or influence in our deliberations."¹⁷

By 1830 the split between labor and capital had become more recognizable. The pro-labor New York Evening

Journal, February 18, 1830, somewhat exaggeratedly attacked the "monopolists and capitalists" who usurped the rights of mechanics, "abridging their privileges by opposing them in their business with the advantage of a large capital." The article went on to assail the practice of hiring unskilled cheap labor, stating that "men who are no mechanics . . . are engaged in mechanical concerns . . . at the expense of the interest of the legitimate mechanics; and in many cases, preventing the industrious, enterprising, but perhaps indigent mechanic, from following his trade to advantage, or from following it at all." This editorial concluded with a defense of the apprenticeship system and the concept of advancement traditionally associated with it. "The ideas of an apprentice are constantly buoyed up by the prospect, not only of being franchised from his indentures, but by a desire to become a proprietor himself; which is . . . necessary alike to master and apprentice, for it increases and strengthens the appetite to become . . . adept, and gives a zest to all his efforts."

In the labor or pro-labor writings of the 1830's an increasingly defensive attitude is discernible. Wage workers felt somehow that they were not highly esteemed and that their social status was waning. "Who is most respected, who is considered as belonging to the higher class?" asked the friend of labor, Orestes Brownson. "He who labors most and is most useful? No. Under the present order of things



to be respectable you must be idle or be able to live upon the vices or misfortunes of others."¹⁸ A writer for the Evening Journal bemoaned that "although the Mechanics are the most useful and powerful body of men in the community, and . . . as respectable as any other class, they are . . . considered in many points inferior. . . . Is it a stain upon the character to gain an honest livelihood by useful industry? . . . There are more real gentlemen among this than any other class."¹⁹ This feeling on the part of mechanics that their social status was waning gave great impetus to the labor movements of the late 1820's and the 1830's.

The trade associations formed by skilled mechanics in the twenties reflected the growing gap between capital and labor. In New York City and in many of the smaller towns within the state stable trade organizations were formed among printers, cabinetmakers, carpenters, hatters, tailors, shoemakers, and others. These societies retained many of the mutual aid features of the earlier craft unions, but the major emphasis shifted to direct economic action. More and more these skilled workers attempted to maintain and improve their position through such weapons as strikes and boycotts.²⁰

One of the most persistent of mechanics' demands was for a shorter work week. The standard day of labor at this time was the traditional one of sunrise to sunset. This system, which had been taken over from agriculture, was



detrimental to industrial laborers. Workers were aware that some free time was necessary if they were to advance in society. A group of mechanics stated in 1835: "We have been too long subjected to the odious, cruel, unjust, and tyrannical system which compels the operative Mechanic to exhaust his physical and mental powers by excessive toil, until he has no desire but to eat and sleep, and in many cases he has no power to do either from extreme debility."²¹ Naturally the work day was relatively short in winter since there were less hours of daylight. But wages were paid on a daily rate regardless of the season of year. Therefore, employers found it advantageous to get as much work as possible done in the spring, summer, and fall. During these seasons the average work day was from 12 to 15 hours. Not only was this a great strain on workers, but it made it economically advantageous for employers to lay off workers in the winter when not as much work could be obtained for the same wages.²²

Another frequent labor protest was against imprisonment for debt. In 1830 the number of persons annually imprisoned in New York State for this offense was estimated to be 10,000. Some were in prison for debts as small as 25 cents. In 1829 George Evans, the editor of The Working Man's Advocate, assessed the number of persons in prison for debts of five dollars or less in New York City alone at nearly 1,000.²³ Debtors prisons were notoriously overcrowded and unsanitary; no provision was made for food, clothing, bedding,

or other necessities except through charity.

In addition to these demands, the workingman's movement persistently advocated free public education. This reform measure was closely associated with the desire of workers to improve their standing, or at least that of their children. New York State had what amounted to two school systems; private schools for the children of those parents who could afford to pay tuition, and charity schools for all others. Schooling was not compulsory and thousands of children received no formal education. In 1829 the Public School Society of New York estimated that 24,000 city children between the ages of 5 and 15 were not enrolled in any school. As late as 1833, the number of children in that age group not in school in the entire state was assessed at 80,000. The worst aspect of New York's education laws was that free education at the charity school was only granted if the parents of a child signed a pauper's oath. Many poor parents being too proud to sign this socially degrading oath kept their children at home.²⁴

The struggle for free public education was consciously anti-aristocratic, and was aimed at aiding equality of opportunity. The Rochester Spirit of the Age blamed the "aristocracy of wealth" for opposing "a general system of education, by which the children of the poor would alike be enabled to enter life, equal in all respects. . . ." ²⁵ A meeting of "Mechanics and other Working Men" held in New York in



December, 1829, drew up a pamphlet calling for a system of education "that shall unite under the same roof the children of the poor man and the rich, the widow's charge and the orphan, where the road to distinction shall be superior industry, virtue and acquirements, without reference to descent." "We believe," the pamphlet continued, "that our existing system of education, if continued, under which many are deprived of all or nearly all its advantages, and which tends in a greater or less degree to separate the children of the poor man and the rich, will eventually lead us into all the distinctions that exist under despotic governments, and destroy our political liberties."²⁶

The New York State militia system also came in for strong criticism by organized workers. Like the educational arrangements the militia system was harder on the poor than on the well-to-do. The law called for periodic drills and parades at which all males of militia age were required to attend. These lasted anywhere from 1 to 3 days, during which time the worker lost his wages. Furthermore, people were expected to provide their own arms and other equipment, imposing an additional financial burden on those least able to pay. Non-attendance was punished by a fine or, if one was unable to pay that, by imprisonment. In New York this fine was \$12, which was generally paid by the wealthier classes. "It is high time," the Mechanics' Press editorialized, "that this expensive and useless mock of pageantry and parade was

done away. For our own part we never could see what peculiar advantage there was to peaceful citizens, in perambulating dusty streets, sweating under a musket or performing a hundred mere showy evolutions that are seldom if ever necessary in actual warfare, to the great detriment of their business and loss of time, which can ill be spared from the working man's necessary avocations."²⁷

Financially workers were also hurt by the fluctuating values of paper currency. It was not uncommon for employers to buy discounted bank notes with which they paid their employees. Laborers had to accept this currency at face value, even though some notes were discounted as much as 50 percent or were totally unnegotiable. In manufacturing towns workers were frequently paid in tickets redeemable only at stores owned and operated by the employer. The prices at these stores were generally higher than elsewhere since the market was assured.²⁸ These factors helped cause the widespread hatred of paper money and banks among workers.

The enmity workers felt for banks was linked with a more general distrust of any privileged institution. Banks were a form of chartered monopoly having special legal privileges by state law in the case of those banks chartered by the New York Assembly or by Federal Law in the case of the Second Bank of the United States. Workers and other classes not directly benefited by banks attacked these institutions as impediments to economic equality. Other chartered

corporations were similarly opposed as monopolies whose "all exclusive privileges, or powers, or facilities, for the accumulation of wealth, or the exclusive use and enjoyment of the bounties of Providence secured to individuals or combinations of men by legislative enactments, the free and uninterrupted enjoyment of which are denied by laws to other members of the same community."²⁹

The general reforms which mechanics felt would bring them the benefits of equal citizenship had not been achieved through trade union activity in the twenties. Unions had been blocked by employer associations using such methods as black-listing, physical force, and, most effectively, court action. English common law traditionally held that whenever two or more persons conspired to do something jointly, even when an individual was entitled to take such an action, the public interest was endangered and therefore the action was an illegal conspiracy. This common-law definition of conspiracy was applied by American courts to mean that any combination of workers who aimed to raise their wages or shorten their hours through united action was illegal.³⁰ In the twenties six conspiracy trials are recorded, including one against the New York hatters in 1823 and one against the Buffalo tailors in 1824. All of these cases were decided in favor of employers.³¹

In this light it was natural that skilled workers, many of whom were newly enfranchised, turned in the late



twenties to direct political action. A strike of building trade workers in Philadelphia for a ten hour day led to the formation of a general Mechanics Union of Trade Associations in 1827, the first city-wide combination of unions. Subsequently this group formed the Working Men's Labor Party, which in 1828 made considerable local gains.³² The success of the Philadelphia Labor Party, together with depressed economic conditions, stimulated New York City mechanics to organize politically in 1829.³³

Led by Thomas Skidmore, a machinist and radical labor spokesman, New York workers held several mass meetings in the spring of that year. A Committee of Fifty was appointed to assist mechanics in achieving a standard ten hour work day. Skidmore and the Committee also turned to broader political issues. Believing that society's evils stemmed from unequal division of property, Skidmore drew up a plan calling for equal land distribution.³⁴ At a general gathering of workingmen in October, 1829, Skidmore's plan was not enthusiastically received; however, a separate recommendation calling for independent political action was heartily endorsed. A State Assembly slate was nominated and the new New York Working Men's Party began a vigorous two week campaign for the November election. The Tammany and Masonic newspapers denounced the "Workies" as atheists, infidels, agrarians and foreign rabble, but the election results were highly encouraging for the Working Men's Party. One candidate,



a carpenter named Ebenezer Ford, was elected to the Assembly, and every other candidate on the slate made a respectable showing, gaining at least 6,000 of the 21,000 votes cast.³⁵

Early in 1830 the workingmen's movement spread throughout upstate New York. Organizations of "farmers, mechanics, and workingmen" won local elections at Albany, Troy, Syracuse, and Canandaigua that spring. Workers' parties were also active in Schenectady, Rochester, Ithaca, Auburn, Geneva, Batavia, Palmyra, Utica, Kingsbury, and Glens Falls. In August, 1830, a state convention representing most of New York's mechanics' parties met in Syracuse to nominate a candidate for governor and other state offices.³⁶

In spite of the rapid spread of the workingmen's movement in the state, labor parties were already on the decline before the 1830 convention met. The New York City party from the beginning had been plagued by doctrinaire disputes which split the party. Skidmore's scheme for equal distribution of property had not met with general approval. As a result he and a handful of followers seceded, forming the Equal Rights party, and thereby weakening labor's unity.³⁷ A second splintering occurred over labor's education plank. One faction headed by Robert Dale Owen, the son to the English reformer, and George Henry Evans, the editor of The Working Man's Advocate, championed a system of "state guardianship" in which all children would be placed in state boarding schools and given equal education, dress, and housing at

public expense. Repelled by the extremes of the Owenite program a third faction headed by Noah Cook and Henry G. Guyon separated and formed still another party.³⁸

When the state convention met in Syracuse the dissension within the New York City party proved disastrous. Rival delegations attended the meeting, and professional politicians of the major parties, taking advantage of the dissension, were able to win most of the workers' support by pledging to back many of labor's aims. During the next two years workingmen's parties remained active in New York, but their vote dwindled, and most workers virtually gave up the idea of independent political action.³⁹

The failure of labor to organize a politically successful third party is significant. Workers had no real basis for the establishment of such a party since class lines were not clearly drawn. Laborers still did not think of themselves as a separate class, especially the skilled artisans who made up the majority of organized labor. They considered themselves as broadly democratic, opposed only to the few aristocrats who held work in contempt. Their aims were to increase the dignity and status of toil as much as to improve actual working conditions. Many members of the New York Workingmen's Party resented the scornful denunciations heaped upon them by "respectable" politicians and journalists. Such epithets as "levels," "Dirty Shirt party," "mob," and "ring-streaked and speckled rabble" implied a



permanent lower class position which few workers were willing to accept. The membership of the Workingmen's Party, although chiefly drawn from the ranks of craft workers, represented a wide segment of society from unskilled laborers to professional people. The single characteristic most common to members was the desire to get ahead--to gain greater equality of opportunity and thus to be able to participate more fully in American prosperity. Walter Hugins, the historian of the New York Workingmen's Party, concluded after studying the biographies of fifty New York labor leaders that none of these men considered himself to be part of a permanent working class. "Disparate and diverse as their origins and careers might be, they seemed to share the desire for change, a striving for self-improvement."⁴⁰

The rejection by workingmen of radical panaceas such as Skidmore's plan for equal division of property similarly attests to the basically middle-class attitudes of most organized workers. This measure ran counter to the fundamental aim of mechanics which was to acquire property and wealth. As the General Executive Committee of the Workingmen's Party declared, "we expect the reward of our toil, and consider the right to individual property, the strongest incentive to industry."⁴¹

Workers formed unions and political parties largely as a reaction to the altering economic situation which adversely affected their social status. They felt that opportunities

were being closed to them, and organized in an attempt to make the American ideal of social and economic advancement more of an actuality. The major demands of labor--the ten hour day, free public education, abolition of imprisonment for debt, reform of the militia system, abolishment of special privileges and monopolies, and reform of the banking system--were not exclusively for the benefit of the working class. These objectives had broad popular support in Jacksonian America. They helped skilled workers, small shopkeepers and businessmen, professional persons, and most individuals not directly benefited by some legal or social privilege. Numerous grievances against vested interests existed and created wide support to the reform measures initiated by organized labor. The keynote to labor's demands was not a proletarian hatred of capitalist society, but the desire for an equal chance to share the fruits of capitalism.

That labor's demands were not strictly those of a single class is illustrated by the fact that several worker supported measures won broad backing, were taken up by the two major parties and were adopted during the Jacksonian era. While the workmen's party was campaigning in 1830, for example, the Tammany Democrats threw their support behind the workers' demand to abolish imprisonment for debt. Two years later the New York State legislature enacted this reform.⁴² Abolition of the militia system followed more slowly; in 1830 a New York State bill aimed at reducing the time spent

in militia training from two whole days to one afternoon, failed of passage. In 1836, however, the New York legislature with two party support overwhelmingly passed a measure which reduced the fine for non-appearance at drill to a token sum. In practice this put militia drill on a voluntary basis.⁴³

The workers' demand for a standard ten hour day, supported by both unions and the workingmen's political movement, met with some success in the skilled trades. As early as 1829, New York City's mechanics won the shorter day. In 1835, after a series of bitter strikes by artisans in such upstate cities as Albany, Troy, Schenectady, Batavia and Seneca Falls the ten hour day was more generally established. However, unlike other gains, the ten hour day was not enacted into legislation and had to be fought for again on several occasions in the forties and fifties. For the majority of wage workers longer hours continued throughout this period.⁴⁴

Labor demands for free public education made steady progress in New York, winning a much wider base of support than the ten hour program. This movement was in accord with the reform spirit of the age, and humanitarians joined with workers in attempting to improve the educational system. Although educational schemes were hotly debated throughout the thirties, a real free public school system was not established until 1842 in New York City and not until 1849 elsewhere

in the state.⁴⁵

The crusade against monopoly and privileged banking institutions became, of course, a national crusade centered in the Democratic Party. This led not only to the defeat of the "Monster" Bank of the United States, but also to the Independent Treasury Acts of 1840 and 1846. In New York State the circulation of notes valued at less than \$5 was outlawed in 1836. Two years later, with Whig support, New York enacted the nation's first free banking law, removing banks from the realm of chartered monopolies. These measures were a triumph for the workingman as well as a general advance for free enterprise.⁴⁶

IV

Despite the genuine gains for democracy brought about at least in part by the workingmen's movement, workers continued to feel that their social and economic status was declining. Achievements such as the abolishment of imprisonment for debt and the ending of compulsory militia service, although helpful, did not offset the overall economic changes which were bringing formerly independent craftsmen to the level of wage earners. Because of this trade union activity in all the skilled crafts revived in the early thirties. Mechanics took up the struggle with employers in a more militant fashion than ever before.

Far more than earlier movements the struggle of the thirties centered on the economic interest of workers as

opposed to their employers. "The time has now arrived," declared the leader of the New York Typographical Association in 1833, "for the mechanics of our city to arise in their strength and determine that they will no longer submit to the thralldom which they have patiently borne for many years, nor suffer employers to appropriate an undue share of the avails of the labourer to his disadvantage."⁴⁷

Inflation which accompanied the return of prosperity in the thirties was also an important factor contributing to renewed trade union activity. The period from 1832 to 1837 was one of unprecedented speculation accompanied by an extravagant rise of prices. Jackson's veto of the bank bill, and his subsequent withdrawal of funds from the Bank as well as Biddle's questionable behavior helped unleash an inflationary spiral. One-hundred-and-ninty-four new banks were founded between 1834 and 1837; the amount of money in circulation rose by more than 75 percent. The cost of living soared an estimated 66 percent from 1834 to 1836. For example, flour rose during this period from \$5 a barrel to \$12. Real estate values increased by more than 220 percent, and rents advanced accordingly.⁴⁸ The excess of paper currency issued by banks drove specie out of circulation. Workers were forced to accept paper bills at face value which could only be spent at a discount. The smaller notes with which workers largely dealt were the most questionable. Labor newspapers complained against this "fictitious

capital" that robbed workers and created an "indolent aristocracy."⁴⁹ Wages did not keep pace with this inflationary spiral, and many workers were reduced to poverty.

Trade associations were revived in all the formally organized crafts during the period from 1832 to 1837, and numerous additional trades were unionized for the first time, including the New York cabinetmakers, and silk hatters. Nor were skilled workers the only ones to organize at this time. Unions were formed among all classes of workers. In New York there appeared the Ladies' Shoebinders and the Female Union Association. Elsewhere unskilled factory workers took the initial steps toward unionization.⁵⁰

The rapid multiplication of trade societies led quite naturally to attempts to broaden and unite the entire labor movement. New York City workers paved the way for closer cooperation between unions by organizing in 1833 the General Trades' Union, a city-wide federation of unions. By 1836, fifty-two trade societies were associated with this General Union. In Albany, Troy, Schenectady and other up-state cities similar central trades' councils were formed.⁵¹ A beginning was even made to establish a national labor movement. In 1834 representatives of trade societies from New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Boston, Poughkeepsie, and Newark met in Manhattan and organized the National Trades' Union, which hoped to aid in founding unions throughout the country and to promote the general welfare of the

laboring classes. However, labor's interests were still too local and their organization too loose to have an effective national movement, and the National Trades' Union never amounted to much.

Nevertheless, organized labor was more active and vigorous in the mid-1830's than it was to be again for nearly half a century. In the country as a whole there were over two-hundred active trade associations with a membership estimated at anywhere from 100,000 to 300,000. In New York over two-thirds of the city's workers were said to be union members. The chief weapon of labor at this time was the strike. Contemporary accounts record over 160 such turn-outs between 1833 and 1837, most of which were for higher wages.⁵³

But, as in the twenties, employers also organized to curb the power of labor. In New York employers of curriers and leather workers mutually agreed not to employ "any man who is known to be a member of . . . any society which has for its object the direction of terms or prices for which workmen shall engage themselves."⁵⁴ By 1836 there were at least eight such employers' associations in the city. Black-listing of union members was the most common means used against labor. But the conservative courts, as previously, proved to be the employers' greatest ally.

In 1829 the New York State Assembly passed a statute making it a conspiracy "to commit any act injurious to public

morals or to trade or commerce." At the time this was not aimed specifically against organized workers, but by interpretation it became the strongest weapon of employers against the trades' unions.⁵⁵ The first use of this law was in the Geneva shoemakers' case of 1835. Journeymen shoemakers had organized there and adopted a wage scale, agreeing not to work for less, and not to work in the same shop with anyone who did. The shoemakers struck a shop employing a man at a lower wage and the master had the workers indicted under the 1829 statute. The case went to the State Supreme Court where the shoemakers were found guilty of conspiracy since their action was "injurious to trade or commerce." The decision went on to imply that it was illegal to combine to raise wages. The precedent established by this decision seemed to leave organized labor in New York State virtually powerless.⁵⁶

Following the case against the Geneva shoemakers, employers of striking journeymen tailors in New York had twenty of their pickets arrested for conspiracy. As in the shoemakers' trial the tailors were found guilty. Ogden Edwards, the presiding judge, stigmatized trades' unions as "illegal combinations." This decision outraged New York workers, and in the week that elapsed between the guilty verdict and the sentence preparations were made for massive protests. A coffin-bedecked leaflet was circulated calling on workingmen to attend court on the day the tailors were

to be sentenced. "On Monday, June 6, 1836, these Freemen are to receive their sentence, to gratify the hellish appetites of the Aristocracy. On Monday, the Liberty of the Workingmen will be interred! Judge Edwards is to chant the Requiem! Go! Go! Go! every Freeman, every Workingman, and hear the melancholy sound of the earth on the Coffin of Equality!" The appeal of the unionists was distinctly stated in class-conscious terms. The circular went on to proclaim:

The Rich Against the Poor
 Judge Edwards, the tool of the aristocracy, against the people! Mechanics and Workingmen! A deadly blow has been struck at your Liberty! . . . The Freemen of the North are now on the level with the slaves of the South! With no other privilege than laboring, that drones may fatten on your life-blood!⁵⁷

The courtroom was filled to overflowing when sentence was pronounced against the tailors; a week later a mass meeting of workingmen drew over 27,000 persons to City Hall Park where Judge Edwards was burned in effigy.⁵⁸

The reaction against the decision in the Tailors' Case was so strong that it probably influenced subsequent decisions in which unions were involved. At any rate, less than three weeks after the Tailors' Case decision, the Hudson shoemakers who had been enforcing a closed shop were found not guilty of conspiracy. And in a famous Massachusetts Supreme Court decision of 1840 (Commonwealth v. Hunt) Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw declared trade unions to be legal organizations. This Massachusetts decision established

a precedent followed in New York and most other states between 1840 and the Civil War.⁵⁹

However, well before Judge Shaw rendered his precedent setting decision, trade unions had virtually ceased to exist. In 1837 the prosperous conditions that buoyed up the labor movement came to an abrupt end. Speculation, overexpansion and other questionable economic practices punctured the bubble of prosperity with the result that prices plummeted and business stagnated. Hard times swept the nation as Americans experienced the most severe depression they had yet known. For laborers wage reductions or unemployment became the general rule. Forced to choose between starving or working for a pittance most workers decided on the latter. Unions were abandoned out of fear of employer retaliation, and all but a handful of the trade associations folded up, along with the city-wide federations and the labor papers.⁶⁰

The gains of the labor movement of the late twenties and thirties proved at best to be only a temporary check against labor's abating position. Its long-range reforms and immediate specific gains in terms of wages and hours were illusory and, in many cases, short-lived victories. Skilled workers were fighting a losing battle against the major economic forces of the Industrial Revolution which rapidly made many of the traditional trades obsolete.

The labor movement had aimed primarily at improving the position of skilled craftsmen working in the apprenticeship system. This system was collapsing and the mechanic was being reduced to the level of a wage worker. However, the station of the skilled artisan was actually better than that of the growing number of unskilled laborers. It remains to examine the conditions under which the non-craft workers toiled in the Jacksonian period.

By 1830 less than half of those designated as workmen were accomplished artisans, and the proportion of non-craft labor grew yearly as factories and machines replaced handicraft shops and craftsmen. Working conditions for those not in the apprenticeship system were generally worse than those endured by journeymen--wages were lower, employment was less secure, and redress of grievances was nearly impossible. There was, in the words of the humanitarian Mathew Carey, a large class of laborers "whose services are so inadequately remunerated, owing to the excess of labour beyond the demand for it, that they can barely support themselves while in good health and fully employed, and, of course when sick or unemployed, must perish, unless relieved by charitable individuals, benevolent societies, or the guardians of the poor."⁶¹

The average city laborer, Carey estimated, earned about 75 cents per day or \$4.50 a week. If he missed only

eight weeks of work from want of employment or illness he would not earn enough to supply a family of four with even the barest necessities. Yet many of this class had much larger families and various emergency expenses.⁶² Their employment even more often than that of skilled workers was on a seasonal basis. For example, unskilled construction workers such as hod carriers were generally laid off in the winter and averaged less than 225 working days yearly. Even when winter employment was available wages were lower since there was always an excess of labor.⁶³

Perhaps the most oppressed workers were the Irish peasants and other unskilled laborers hired to do construction work on canals, turnpikes, and railroads. This toil was hard, low paying, unhealthy, and seasonal. In the winter-time workers, when work was available, rarely averaged more than \$5 a month; sometimes during that season men worked for board alone. The following description of canal work was given in 1833:

Thousands of our labouring people travel hundreds of miles in quest of employment on canals, at 62, 75, and 87 cents per day, paying a dollar and a half or two dollars a week for their board, leaving families behind, depending on them for support. They labour frequently in marshy grounds which destroys their health, often irrevocably. They return to their poor families--with ruined constitutions, with a sorry pittance, most laboriously earned, and take to their beds sick and unable to work. Hundreds are swept off annually, many of them leaving numerous and helpless families. Notwithstanding their wretched fate, their places are quickly supplied by others, although death stares them in the face.⁶⁴

There were countless other laboring positions in which long hours, low pay, and deplorable conditions belied a land of opportunity. In the cities and towns many unskilled workers were needed for such tasks as loading and unloading boats and carts, carrying wood, coal, ice, and bricks, taking care of horses and stables, and performing sundry odd jobs. Some persons not only worked laboriously for poor pay, but also were socially degraded by their position; domestic servants, nurses, charwomen, laundresses, cooks, waiters, barbers, and coach-drivers were among those thus stigmatized. Some of the hardest conditions were those found on ships. Sailors received better pay than unskilled laborers (about \$25 a month), but the harsh discipline and back breaking work were, judging from contemporary accounts, all but unbearable.⁶⁵ Farm laborers received about \$10 per month plus room and board, or \$1 per day without it, but were generally driven hard from sunrise to sunset.

For a woman needing employment because of widowhood, or because she was a spinster, or because her husband's earnings were insufficient, or because she was the daughter of impoverished parents, opportunities were rare. She could take in washing or sewing, do domestic work, open a boarding house, work in a factory, or become a prostitute. None of these options was very rewarding or inspiring. Women who did industrial work at home such as binding shoes or sewing

pre-cut pantaloons averaged about 10 cents per day. House-work paid better, but was considered socially debasing, besides requiring hard work and long hours. In New York City the ready-made clothing industry was highly organized. Sweatshop conditions were the rule. Carey calculated that seamstresses working a full week could sew on the average nine shirts. Prices paid for this work varied from 6 to 10 cents per shirt, giving these women a wage of 54 to 90 cents a week "for the incessant application of a human body, during thirteen or fourteen hours a day, for the payment of rent, the purchase of food, clothes, drink, soap, candles and fuel!"⁶⁶ A New York doctor attributed the growth of prostitution in the city to the poor pay in the needle trades:

My profession affords me many and unpleasant opportunities of knowing the wants of those unfortunate females, who try to earn an honest subsistence by the needle, and to witness the struggles often made by honest pride and destitution. I could cite many instances of young and even middle-aged women, who have been "lost to virtue," apparently by no other cause than the lowness of wages, and THE ABSOLUTE IMPOSSIBILITY OF PROCURING THE NECESSARIES OF LIFE BY HONEST INDUSTRY.⁶⁷

The distress of the laboring classes was greatest during times of economic recession. Winters, as previously stated, were usually such periods. Employment was scarce, wages were lower, and expenses higher. In New York, as Horace Greeley observed, "legions of laborers, servants, etc., are annually dismissed in Autumn from the farms, country-seats, and watering places of the suburban districts, and drift down to the city, . . . vaguely hoping to find



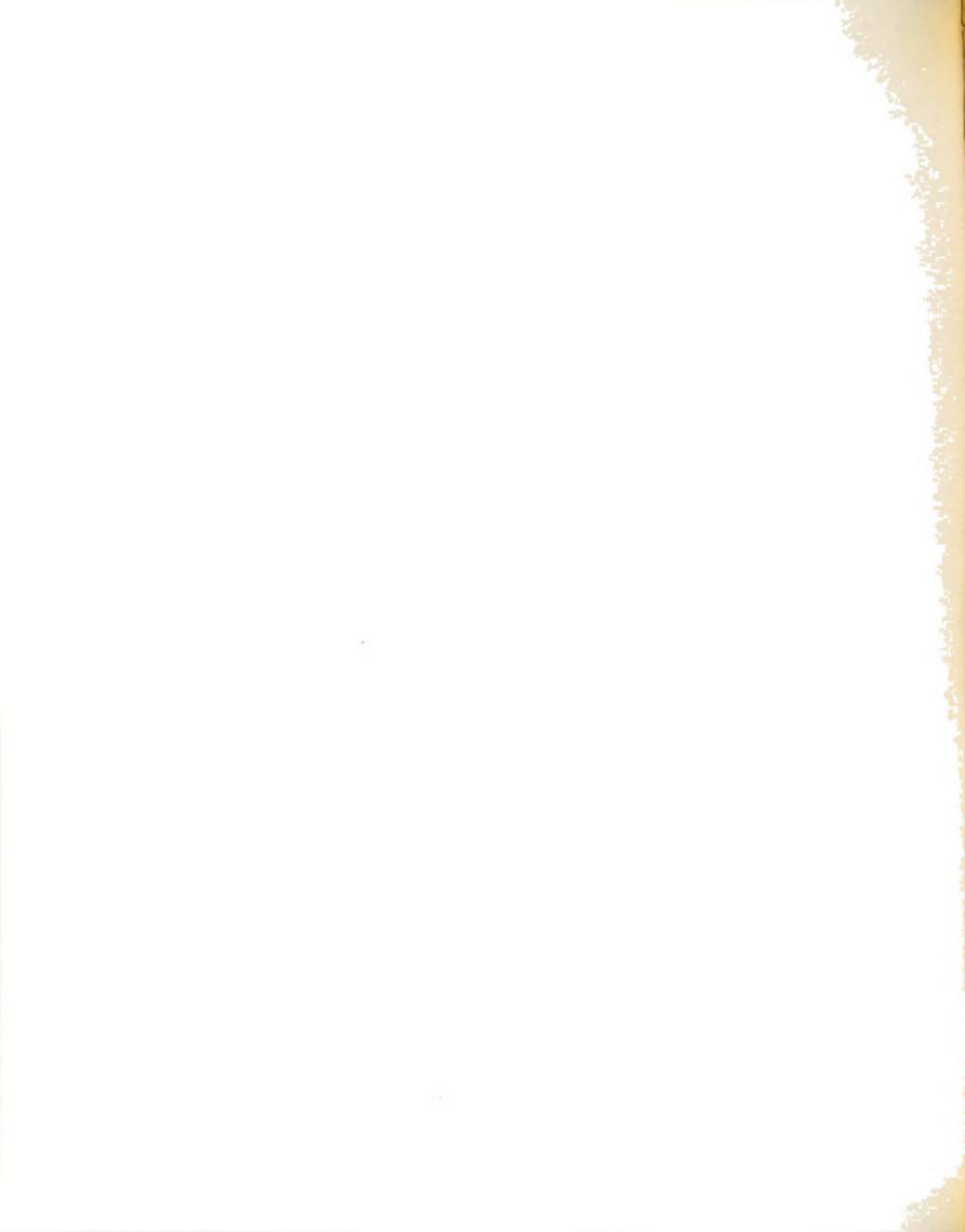
work here, which a small portion of them do: the rest live on the good-nature of relatives, if such they have here, or on credit from boarding-houses, landlords, or grocers, so long as they can; and then make their choice between roguery and beggary. . . ."68

Even summers sometimes brought unusual hardships. In the summer of 1832 and again in 1834 Asiatic cholera epidemics ravaged New York State, killing thousands, especially in overcrowded city areas. Mechanics and laborers were the most affected. Living generally in heavily populated slums or shanty towns, workers were more susceptible to contagious diseases. Unlike the wealthier classes they could not afford to flee the cities for safer rural locations. Furthermore these epidemics brought business in New York City and elsewhere nearly to a standstill, throwing thousands out of work who ordinarily looked to the summer as a time of full employment.⁶⁹

Well before the panic of 1837 plunged New York's working classes into an extended period of hard times, there were signs that changing economic conditions were creating permanent inequalities in New York society. The skilled worker, as has been shown, was losing ground socially and economically, while the position of the unskilled laborer was by any standard already abominable. The labor movement in both its unionist and political phases was in the long run unable to stay labor's decline. The revolutions in industry

and transportation were transforming American life. Daily it was becoming clearer that the Jeffersonian ideal of a nation composed of independent yeomen and craftsmen was not to be. Workers themselves were increasingly aware that the American ideal of equality was rapidly receding.⁷⁰

Yet despite the harshness of laboring conditions in the 1830's, working-class persons were undoubtedly better off in this decade than in the forties and fifties. For one thing there was greater social mobility. Most workers did not view their wage earning status as permanent. Many skilled artisans still owned property and their tools of production. Since the factory had not completely replaced the craft shop the possibility of rising through the ranks of apprentice and journeyman to become a shop-owning master remained a possibility. Alternatives to laboring were also more prevalent than in later decades. In the thirties proportionately more workers had agricultural experience than in subsequent years and becoming a farmer was feasible. Furthermore, many lines of business endeavor were in their beginning stages in the thirties and a small investment often brought great rewards to the ambitious mechanic; whereas two decades later business had passed more and more into the hands of well-to-do capitalists, and new business opportunity for a person lacking large amounts of capital was reduced. These factors together with increased industrialization, mass immigration and periodic depressions combined



to cause the position of New York workers to decline still further in the two decades before the Civil War.

FOOTNOTES

¹Michael Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in The United States (Garden City, N. Y., 1961 ed.), pp. 267-68; Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (2 vols., New York, 1945), II, 182-83; Abram C. Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York (New York, 1897), p. 194.

²The Emigrant's Guide to the United States of America (London, 1830), p. 58; on actual wages in the 1830's see: John R. Commons and others, History of Labour in the United States (4 vols., New York, 1918-35), I, 415-16; Philip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States (2 vols., New York, 1947), I, 98-101.

³Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States, pp. 330-32.

⁴Quoted in William Cobbett, The Emigrant's Guide (London, 1830), pp. 65-66.

⁵Thomas Cather, Voyage to America (New York, 1961), p. 102.

⁶America, Historical, Statistical, and Descriptive (3 vols., London, 1841), II, 414-15.

⁷Quoted in Cobbett, Emigrant's Guide, p. 92.

⁸[New York] Evening Journal, January 9, 1830; [New York] The Working Man's Advocate, March 6, 1830.

⁹Walter Hugins, Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829-37, Stanford Studies in History, Economics, and Political Science, XIX (Stanford, Calif., 1960), pp. 51-53; Carl R. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York, 1927), pp. 88-89.

¹⁰John R. Commons and others, eds., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society (10 vols., Cleveland, 1910), V, 23.

¹¹Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 169-70, 172-74.

¹²Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America (New York, 1960 ed.), pp. 20-24.

¹³Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 34-61.

¹⁴Alexander C. Flick, ed., History of the State of New York (10 vols., New York, 1933-37), V, 346-56.

¹⁵The role of the merchant-capitalist is fully discussed in: Fred M. Jones, Middlemen in the Domestic Trade of the United States, 1800-1860, Illinois Studies in Social Sciences, XXI (Urbana, Ill., 1937); see also: Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 338-40; Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 67-68.



¹⁶Dulles, Labor in America, pp. 24-28; Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 339-48.

¹⁷Quoted in New York Panorama (New York, 1938), p. 382.

¹⁸Working Man's Advocate, March 13, 1830.

¹⁹Evening Journal, October 17, 1829.

²⁰Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 153-57; Joseph G. Rayback, A History of Labor (New York, 1959), pp. 58-59.

²¹[New York] The Man, May 13, 1835.

²²Ibid.; Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 171-75.

²³Working Man's Advocate, October 31, 1829, January 6, February 27, 1830.

²⁴The Picture of New York and Stranger's Guide to the Commercial Metropolis of the United States (New York, 1828), p. 333; Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 181.

²⁵Quoted in The Working Man's Advocate, March 13, 1830.

²⁶Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of American Industrial Society, V, 157-58.

²⁷Quoted in The Working Man's Advocate, January 30, 1830.



²⁸[New York] The Union, April 30, 1836.

²⁹Working Man's Advocate, January 3, 1835; Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 124-25.

³⁰Dulles, Labor in America, pp. 29-31.

³¹Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 162-65.

³²Ibid., I, 185-98.

³³Dulles, Labor in America, p. 35; Rayback, A History of American Labor, pp. 68-69.

³⁴Skidmore's economic thought is treated in: Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind in American Civilization (3 vols., New York, 1946-49), II, 641-45; Skidmore's proposed plan is found in: Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of American Industrial Society, V, 149-54.

³⁵Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of American Industrial Society, V, 155-56; Working Man's Advocate, November 7, 1829.

³⁶Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 260-65.

³⁷Ibid., I, 242-45.

³⁸Ibid., I, 245-60; Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of American Industrial Society, V, 157-77.

³⁹Dulles, Labor in America, pp. 44-46.

⁴⁰Hugins, Jacksonian Democracy, p. 110.



⁴¹[New York] Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate,
June 23, 1830.

⁴²Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI,
68; Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (New York, 1962 ed.),
p. 285; Dulles, Labor in America, pp. 49-50.

⁴³Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 329-30;
Rayback, A History of American Labor, pp. 89-90.

⁴⁴Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 234-35;
Rayback, A History of American Labor, pp. 59-60, 77.

⁴⁵Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, pp. 233-41.

⁴⁶Rayback, A History of American Labor, pp. 87-91.

⁴⁷Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of
American Industrial Society, V, 212.

⁴⁸Dulles, Labor in America, p. 54; Rayback, A History
of American Labor, pp. 75-76.

⁴⁹The Union, April 30, 1836.

⁵⁰Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 350-56;
Dulles, Labor in America, pp. 54-58.

⁵¹Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 365-69;
Dulles, Labor in America, pp. 58-59.

⁵²Rayback, A History of American Labor, pp. 78-81.

⁵³Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United
States, I, 108; Dulles, Labor in America, p. 71.



⁵⁴Quoted in Dulles, Labor in America, p. 64.

⁵⁵Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 405-06.

⁵⁶Ibid., I, 406-07.

⁵⁷Ibid., I, 409-11; Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of American Industrial Society, V, 314-22; for a contemporary account by a conservative see: Allen Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone (New York, 1936), pp. 211-12.

⁵⁸Dulles, Labor in America, p. 65.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 454-58.

⁶¹Appeal to the Wealthy of the Land, Ladies as Well as Gentlemen, on the Character, Conduct, Situation, and Prospects of Those Whose Sole Dependence for Subsistence Is on the Labour of Their Hands (Philadelphia, 1833), p. 5.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁶³Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 3-5, 8-10.

⁶⁵Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s classic Two Years Before the Mast (1840) is the best contemporary account of the common seaman's life in the 1830's.

⁶⁶Appeal to the Wealthy, p. 3.

⁶⁷Dr. Rensselaer to M. Carey in Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁶⁸Recollections of a Busy Life (New York, 1868),
p. 144.

⁶⁹Contemporary accounts on the effects of the cholera epidemic on New York City's working people are: Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone, pp. 73-74; Greeley, Recollections, pp. 88-89.

⁷⁰Working Man's Advocate, March 6, 1830.

CHAPTER 3

MANORS AND COUNTING HOUSES

The great error into which nearly all foreigners and most Americans fall, who write or speak of society in this country, arises from confounding the political with the social system. In most countries, in England, France, and all those nations whose government is monarchical or aristocratic, these systems are indeed similar. . . . But in America the two systems are totally unconnected, and altogether different in character. In remodelling the form of the administration, society remained unrepublican. There is perfect freedom of political privilege, all are the same upon hustings, or at a political meeting; but this equality does not extend to the drawing-room. None are excluded from the highest councils of the nation, but it does not follow that all can enter into the highest ranks of society. In point of fact, we think that there is more exclusiveness in the society of this country, than there is in that even of England--far more than there is in France.

--The Laws of Etiquette, 1836

I

The United States was the first great country in modern times not having positive hereditary ranks and distinctions. Here there was no titled nobility possessing definite legal and social privileges. Government was democratic; there was no established church; laws of primogeniture and entail had long been abolished. Before the law all men, at least in theory, were equal, and the road to social and economic advancement was open to everyone.



However, American equality was that of rights and not a general condition of society. As Tocqueville wrote, "I know of no country . . . where profounder contempt is expressed for the theory of permanent equality of property."¹ Recognizable class distinctions existed in this country and were accepted by all ranks of society. The terms "lady" and "gentleman," for example, were used discriminately. A contemporary wrote, "The appellation of sales-lady to a saleswoman would have been held as a joke, and would have been resented by the recipient of the term."² In both the fictional and non-fictional writings of the period quite sharp class demarcations were taken for granted. Such class references as the following two selected at random from N. T. Hubbard's Autobiography were typical: "The General was highly respected by all classes of his fellow citizens" (p. 89); or "Our company was composed of the best class of young men . . ." (p. 90). It seems evident then that Americans recognized various social ranks. Classes could be distinguished by such factors as wealth, dress, speech, manners, education, and general way of life. This chapter will attempt to examine those considered to be of the upper classes in Jacksonian New York.

The most important single criterion for high social standing was wealth. "The avarice of an American, in general," observed a Britisher, "is nothing more than the passion of ambition directed to the acquisition of wealth

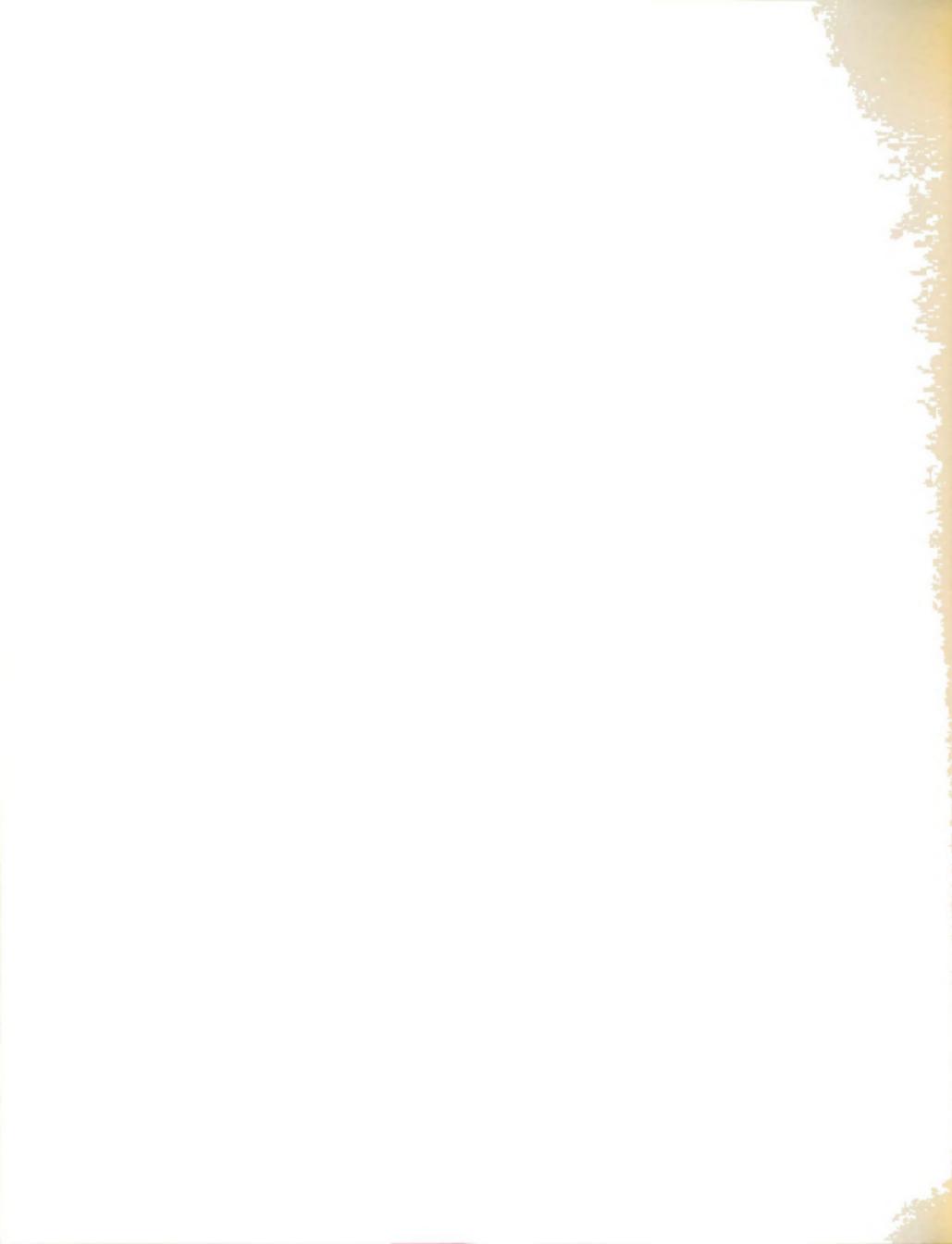
as the only means of attaining distinction in the state of society in which he is placed."³ Wealth has always been related to gentlemanliness. It provides a distinguishing feature in itself while at the same time bestowing on its possessor the leisure and means to cultivate social refinements.⁴ The lack of permanent hereditary distinctions made material success that much more important. This factor gave a mercantile tone to our best society which foreign gentlemen often derided. A German nobleman remarked sarcastically that by watching the manner in which an American lady courtesied to the gentlemen that were presented to her, one was "able to distinguish the capitalist from the poor beginner, or unsuccessful speculator, as effectually as if their property has been announced with their names. Every additional thousand produces a new smile."⁵

Historically, no aristocracy has rested on wealth alone. America was no exception. Family was an important consideration. In New York State well-known Hudson Valley families such as the Van Rensselaers, Livingstons, and Schuylers formed a landed gentry inheriting both property and position. Lesser landholders such as the Coopers of Cooperstown or the Peter Smiths of Peterboro were in a similar position. In New York City family background was equally significant. Knickerbocker society was tightly knit. Its leading members were merchants, professional, and literary people; some were well-to-do, others were not,

but all were from respected families. This society, according to contemporaries, was very exclusive, and difficult for a stranger to break into regardless of his wealth.⁶

The theoretical concept of aristocracy had been widely discussed during the early years after the Revolution. Class concepts had to be reconciled to the new democratic Republic. Federalists, fearing mob rule or anarchy, favored retaining the aristocratic element of society, believing that an hereditary elite was the best safeguard against the evils of democracy. Republicans opposed this view; Jefferson, their chief spokesman, attempted to weld aristocracy to democracy in his theory of a natural aristocracy based on talent and not birth. Aristocracy became a political issue, and with the triumph of the Jeffersonian Republicans the basis for gentlemanliness was theoretically broadened. Based on natural selection it was no longer the hoarded property of a single class. Federalism withered, and with it the concept of an hereditary upper class suffered a setback.⁷

But side by side with the notion of an aristocracy of talent the idea of birth as a determining factor persisted. Once a family had achieved high social standing the chances of their children inheriting this position were good. Children not only fell heir to wealth and property, they also imbibed much of the tastes, habits, refinements, and education of the parents. Furthermore persons tended



to associate with others of similar position and interests. Thus, as the novelist Cooper wrote: "The day laborer will not mingle with the slave; the skilful mechanic feels his superiority over the mere laborer, claims higher wages and has a pride in his craft; the man in trade justly fancies that his habits elevate him above the mechanic, so far as social position is concerned, and the man of refinement, with his education, tastes, and sentiments, is superior to all."⁸ The social milieu in which one was raised often determined one's future status. In spite of popular belief, the carpenter's son was not likely to become a bank president, nor was the frontier Indian fighter apt to end up in the White House.

But sometimes these things did happen, and they happened frequently enough to make the Jeffersonian ideal of an aristocracy of talent seem an actuality. There was sufficient social mobility in America to make it impossible for any one group to form a permanent upper class. The prominent position of the New York landed gentry was steadily challenged by rising merchants, shippers, speculators, and western landholders. These persons in turn were not secure in their social position. Some went bankrupt because of overspeculation or changing economic conditions; others were outstripped by rising competitors. Social gradations were precarious, not being regulated according to fixed titles and ranks. While there were persons of high and low standing,



most Americans, especially those not at the top, believed that these positions reflected an accidental and perhaps temporary situation.

American democracy, far from mitigating competition for social status, intensified it. The concept of equality placed an overwhelming emphasis on "getting ahead," no matter what the accidents of birth, wealth, or class happened to be. Achievement was more important than inheritance and Americans of all ranks felt compelled to demonstrate their success. Foreign observers were surprised at the conspicuous way in which persons in this country flaunted their wealth, even workers tried to "make a show."

The very competition for status made it extremely difficult for one to know just how much he had achieved. Successful persons wondered if they had arrived, or if they were fairly certain of their immediate position, they were plagued with doubts as to whether they could maintain their rank and pass it on to their children. In a traditionally aristocratic society class distinctions are generally known and consequently do not need continual emphasis. However, in America the stress on equality and opportunity made people class-conscious. Those with a claim to a higher status felt a necessity to assert those claims for fear of losing the right to it. High society in the United States, noted a European nobleman, was "characterized by a spirit of exclusiveness and persecution unknown in any other country."



American aristocrats, this observer continued, are just one or two steps removed from the masses; they "think themselves beset by dogs, and are continually kicking for fear of being bitten."⁹

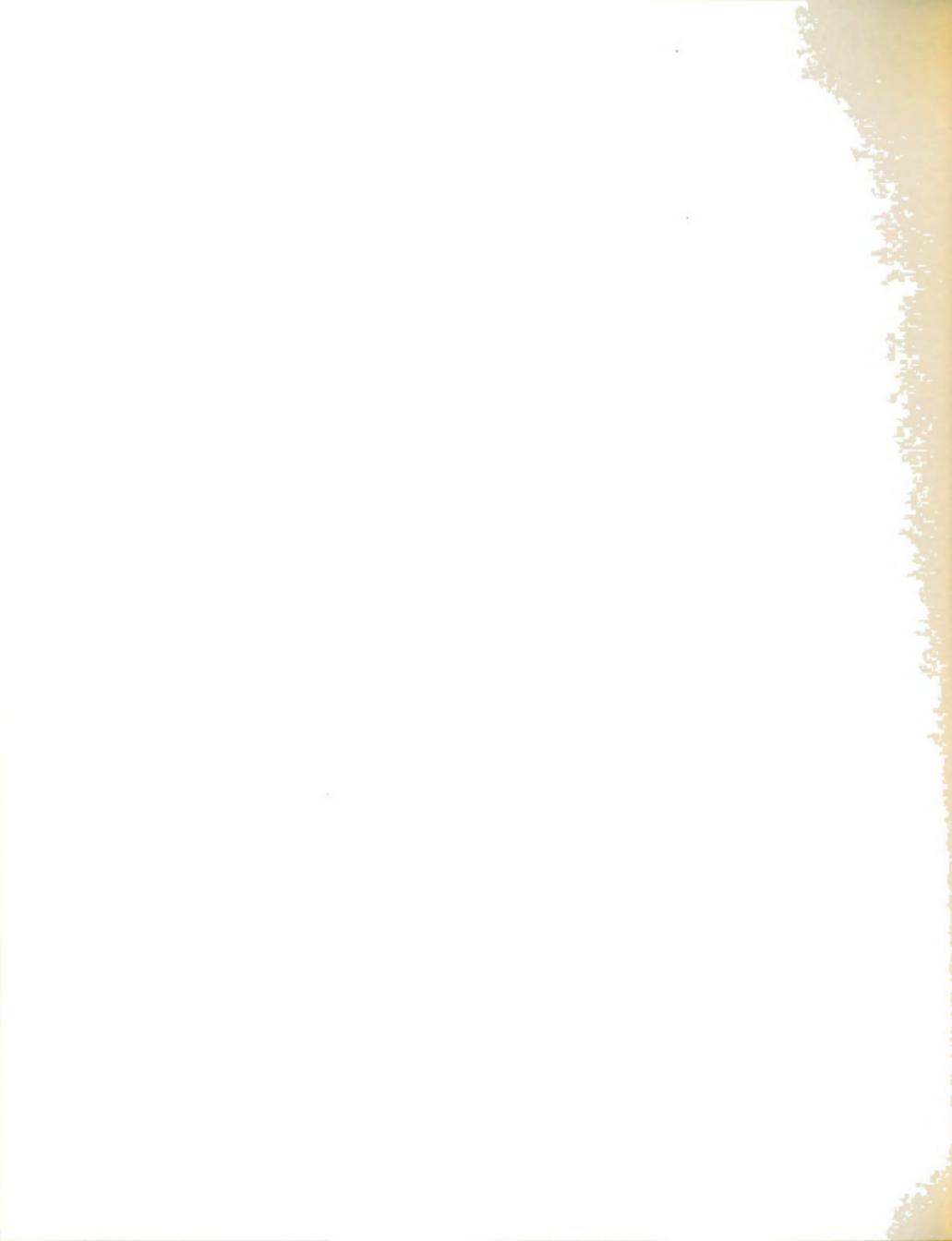
Aristocracies have been tolerated generally because they either protect the lower classes or have little contact with them. But in America the aristocrat was not the protector of the lower classes, rather he was in continual struggle for power with them; nor could incessant contact between classes be avoided. Hence class relations were often characterized by sharp bitterness. The rich instead of being patronizing and kindly to the lower classes arrogantly claimed a rank which the poor were unwilling to grant; bolstered by high notions of equality and provoked by the arrogance of the well-to-do, the poor in their turn angrily attacked "that noxious weed of aristocracy" in terms that a European laboring man would not offer his equals.¹⁰ "Your state of society," said the German Francis Grund to an American aristocrat, "is such, that, in the ordinary intercourse with your fellow-citizens, you must necessarily offend more than you can gratify; and the mortifications which two-thirds of the whole population are constantly suffering from the small portion distinguished from the rest by nothing but success in business, must add to the natural jealousies felt by the labouring classes of all countries with regard to the rich. The distinction between the different orders



of society may be more apparent in England, . . . but they are, nevertheless, far less offensive than yours."¹¹

New York's upper classes did not form a unified estate. There were various coteries of aristocratic persons. In the cities the best society was commercially centered, but also included professional persons such as eminent doctors, lawyers, literary figures, ministers, and professors. Even the frontier communities of western New York had their own local aristocracies composed of large landholders, merchants and industrialists, and lawyer-politicians.

In 1828 Basil Hall, travelling by stage over the rough plank roads west of Syracuse, came upon a thriving town in the midst of the wilderness. "Driver," he called, "what is the name of this village?" "Camillus, sir." "And what is that great building?" "That is the seminary--the polytechnic." "And that great stone house?" "Oh, that is the wool-factory."¹² The English novelist Charles Augustus Murray, journeying across western New York a few years after Hall, was surprised at seeing so many mansions which stood out from ordinary farms in size and luxuriance. He stayed at a handsome estate along the Genesee River south of Rochester, "which," in his words, "many of the proudest nobility of Europe might look upon with envy. . . ."¹³ Seminaries, factories, and magnificent manors were symbolic of a society concerned with social distinctions. As an historian writing about New York's upper Susquehanna Valley



in this period concluded: "There is no evidence of a desire to establish a classless society. Established families imitated the habits of high society as it was in New York City and other established Eastern communities."¹⁴

II

The general trend was for aristocracy to grow stronger in New York during the three decades preceding the Civil War, but there was one exception. The most privileged faction in colonial New York, the landed gentry of the Hudson Valley, was by the age of Jackson waning in power and importance. In 1830 this landed elite was still a significant coterie, composed of a few families, closely connected through inter-marriage and interests, and indirectly holding sway over nearly two million acres of land and an estimated 300,000 persons.¹⁵ However, these aristocrats were becoming land-poor in a time when cities such as New York were beginning to produce the greatest wealth in the nation.

To encourage colonialization of New Netherlands the Dutch West India Company in the seventeenth century had established patroonships along the Hudson. Large land grants were made to members of the company who would establish an American colony of fifty or more persons within four years. Those establishing such a settlement were granted the title of patroon and had full property rights as well as civil and military control over the people. In

short it was a form of feudalism in which the patroon had baronial authority over his tenants. When the English took over rule of New York from the Dutch in 1664, this system was continued and even extended. The Dutch patroons were allowed to retain their holdings, although officially the patroonship was transformed in title to a manor and the patroon into the lord of the manor. The English continued the policy of large land grants, creating nine manors and numerous smaller but still substantial estates. In this way the English hoped to build up a powerful landed aristocracy which would, in the words of the last colonial governor, "counterpoise in some measure the general levelling spirit that so prevails in some of His Majesty's governments."¹⁶

However, from the beginning this type of transplanted feudalism had met with resistance. On a number of occasions actual armed clashes took place between aspiring tenants and their landlords. In 1766, for example, there was a tenant rebellion which was not suppressed until British troops were brought in.¹⁷

During the period of the Revolution the power of the large landholders was somewhat reduced. They were stripped of their baronial honors and lost some of their special legal privileges and feudal rights. Entail and primogeniture were outlawed, thus ensuring the eventual partition of the great estates. Small gains in freehold ownership were also made



with the breaking up of the estates of those manor lords who had served the Tory cause during the war. The large holdings of the DeLanceys, Philippses, and Johnsons were confiscated, bought up by speculators, and in many cases sold in smaller divisions to farm families.¹⁸

Despite these gains for agrarian democracy, the large landholders continued to dominate the Hudson Valley in the years following the Revolution. Many of the confiscated lands were bought up by Whig landlords who were thus able to augment their already large holdings. The number of tenants or leaseholders was greatly increased, and for the first time this system was utilized by landlords in the Mohawk and upper Delaware Valleys, and as far west as the Genesee Valley. Leases varied from manor to manor; most were termed "durable" since they were held in perpetuity. Generally the lessee was required to pay a certain yearly rent either in money, crops, service, or some combination of the three. On the Van Rensselaer estate tenant farmers paid 10 to 14 bushels of winter wheat per 100 acres, plus four fat fowls, and one day's work with a team of horses or oxen. In addition, landlords generally reserved the rights to timber, mill sites, water power, minerals, and other resources. When a leasehold was sold by a tenant the landlord was entitled to receive one-quarter or one-third of the amount realized from the sale.¹⁹

Among the chief families composing the Hudson River gentry in Jacksonian times were the Livingstons, Morrises, and Jays of British descent, and the Van Rensselaers, Hardenberghs, Verplancks, Van Cortlandts, and Schuylers of Dutch origin. Of these the Van Rensselaers were by far the most important. Their two hundred year old manor, Rensselaerwyck, embraced all of Rensselaer and Albany counties and part of Columbia county; it had been the first patroonship granted. In 1838 between sixty- and one-hundred-thousand tenants farmed these extensive lands, supervised by the eighth patroon, Stephen Van Rensselaer III--one of the foremost men in the state in point of social prominence.²⁰

By the Jacksonian period Van Rensselaer had been lord of Rensselaerwyck for over sixty years. During this time the tenancy system had been extended; much of the formerly uncultivated uplands had been leased out.²¹ However, like most of the Hudson Valley gentry Van Rensselaer was not a harsh landlord since any insistence on enforcing all of the remaining feudal rights would have made it difficult to obtain tenants. Because of this nearly all feudal obligations had fallen into disuse. Most tenants were assessed a simple money rent, and even this payment was not always collected by the "Good Patroon." On the other hand, Van Rensselaer never sold lands outright and had his agents keep a strict account of all unpaid rent. When he died in January, 1839, the amount of rent in arrears was nearly \$400,000.²²



Although it was not considered so at the time, the death of Stephen Van Rensselaer III marked the end of an era. His passing affected not only his own tenants but the entire tenancy system. This form of land tenure, though not strictly enforced, was anachronistic in Jacksonian America. Unrest among tenant farmers desiring freehold ownership had long been widespread, and periodic clashes between land agents and renters were common. Major dissension on the part of the Van Rensselaer tenants had probably been averted during the latter years of the Good Patroon's life only because of his forbearance in collecting back rents. Tenants accustomed to this leniency did not think that they would ever be called upon to pay their arrearages; few could afford to pay; almost none were willing. But the old patroon had contracted various debts during his long life; and, not wanting to diminish the inheritance of his two sons, Stephen and William, he left a will requiring that his creditors be paid from the uncollected rents.²³

On hearing of this plan farmers held protest meetings. A committee representing the lessees of western Albany County was brusquely turned away in their attempt to meet with Stephen Van Rensselaer IV, who had inherited his father's holdings west of the Hudson.²⁴ Angered by this treatment, tenants on July 4, 1839 held a mass meeting at Berne, the highest point in the Helderberg mountains of Albany County. A declaration of independence from landlord rule was drawn

up declaring that: "We will take up the ball of the Revolution where our fathers stopped it and roll it to the final consummation of freedom and independence of the masses."²⁵

Stephen Van Rensselaer met this declaration by sending a sheriff with writs of ejection against several of the tenants' leaders. But the sheriff, Michael Artcher and his deputy Daniel Leonard, were manhandled by the embittered tenants, now organized into armed bands determined to resist the implementation of the deceased patroon's will. In December 1839 the farmers, or Anti-Renters as they were now called, successfully turned back a posse of five hundred men led by Sheriff Artcher and including such persons as former Governor William Marcy and John Van Buren, the President's son. The Sheriff then appealed to Governor William Seward to call out the State Militia and restore law and order. Seven hundred militia men were sent to the Helderberg Hills; at the same time the Governor issued a proclamation warning the Anti-Renters of the seriousness of their resistance. Under these pressures the tenants gave in without battle, and several of their leaders were evicted from their farms.²⁶

But the will to resist the landlords was not broken. Tenants continued to refuse payment of their back rents and even stopped paying rents altogether. Disguised as Indians and dressed in calico they harassed sheriffs, deputies, and land agents, using the traditional American method of tarring and feathering.

Oh hark! in the mountains I hear a great roar;
 Those Helderberg farmers are at it once more,
 With their war whoops and Indians most wickedly bent
 On shaving Van Rensselaer out of his rent;
 And the way they make war
 Is to feather and tar
 Every unfortunate law-seeking gent,
 Who by landlord or sheriff among them is sent. . . .²⁷

From Rensselaerwyck the Anti-Rent movement quickly spread throughout the Hudson Valley. Tenants turned Indian terrorized the land. On one occasion late in 1844 three companies of State Militia were sent to the town of Hudson where angry farmers threatened to storm the jail to release one of their leaders, Smith Boughton, known as Big Thunder. A year later following the murder of an undersheriff at an eviction sale, Governor Silas Wright declared Delaware County to be in a state of insurrection.²⁸

The Anti-Rent movement became highly organized in the early forties on the town, county, and eventually state levels. Anti-Renters printed their own newspapers, held conventions, drew up pamphlets and petitions, and elected representatives to the State Legislature. They became an important political force, and in 1845 candidates endorsed by the Anti-Renters were quite successful. Both major parties now seemed to bend over backwards to grant the rebellious renters relief from landlord rule. Legislative enactments outlawed the landlord's right to seize the goods of a defaulting tenant, and a tax was levied on rent income.²⁹ In 1846 a constitutional convention amended New York's



Constitution, making illegal any future lease of agricultural land for a period longer than twelve years.³⁰

The election of 1846 was advantageous for Anti-Renters. Both the Whig and Democratic parties were wracked with dissension, and this gave the Anti-Rent block of votes more power than their numerical strength warranted. John Young, the Whig candidate for governor, promised if elected to free imprisoned Anti-Rent leaders. At a convention in Albany the Anti-Rent party gave their endorsement to Young; this proved decisive. Good as his word, Young had those Anti-Renters in prison released.³¹ In 1848, Young, again courting Anti-Rent support in hopes of re-election, asked the legislature for the power to investigate the legality of the landlords' titles. In spite of large-scale landlord lobbying against this measure the legislature quickly passed the test of title bill.³²

Fearing the outcome of any legal action and sensing that popular sentiment was running against them, manor lords began selling out their interests. The days of the landed gentry's dominance of the Hudson Valley were numbered. }
Seventeen landed proprietors began selling their holdings in 1845; that same year Stephen Van Rensselaer put his Albany County lands up for sale. By 1850 the Manor of Rensselaerwyck was no longer extant; many of the leases had been sold outright to tenants; others were purchased by speculators who vainly hoped to perpetuate the formerly

profitable tenancy system.³³ The courts aided this downfall. In 1850 the New York Supreme Court held that the hated quarter sales, whereby a tenant who sold his farm paid one-fourth of the price to the landlord, were unconstitutional. This decision implied that the tenants were in effect the freehold owners of their land. The same year the Supreme Court also declared the Van Rensselaer title invalid. This decision increased the willingness of the manor aristocrats to sell out. And, even though the Court of Appeals reversed this invalidation two years later on a technicality, the position of the landlords was not improved since the courts continued to regard the tenants as the rightful owners of the soil.³⁴

Controversy over titles and leases continued sporadically throughout the nineteenth century. As late as the 1880's there was an episode of violence when a deputy sheriff was shot trying to dispossess a Helderberg farmer.³⁵ But in general freeholds had replaced leaseholds by the time of the Civil War, and the era of the manor aristocrats was over.

III

The decline of New York's landed gentry in no way diminished aristocracy in the Empire State. A few persons such as the novelist Fenimore Cooper staunchly maintained that the only true gentility was based on landed property.³⁶

But even in the 1830's Cooper's dream of a splendid yet democratic gentry leading and serving the people was as much a myth as the Jeffersonian ideal of a yeoman Republic. Both ideals were based on the assumption that America was and would remain a rural agrarian society. Yet rapid transportation and widespread commerce, industries and urban areas belied the agrarian dream and altered the American notion of aristocracy. While the countryside was becoming less aristocratic it was rapidly declining in relative importance within the state to the cities, in terms of both wealth and population. Well before the heirs of the last patroon sold their interests in Rensselaerwyck the image of the American aristocrat had changed from the traditional patriarchal square to the wealthy plutocrat--the city-centered merchant or industrialist more concerned with drawing rooms and counting houses than manors and tenants. Unlike the landed aristocrats whose position as an elite group steadily declined before the forces of democracy, capitalist-aristocrats thrived under the laissez-faire economic conditions prevalent in Jacksonian America. Class divisions in the 1830's were more pronounced within New York City and other urban areas than in rural localities, and the spread between rich and poor widened yearly.

New York City in 1830 seemed far removed from the generally quiet farms and manors of rural New York. All was hustle and bustle in the metropolis; everything was



given over to business and speculation as residents attempted to outstrip one another in their quest after the "Almighty Dollar."³⁷ Gotham had grown from a mere 33,000 in 1790 to over 200,000 forty years later.³⁸ In this same period New York became the undisputed commercial center of the New World, greatly surpassing the nearest rivals--Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.³⁹ Foreign visitors were impressed with the city. The Frenchman Michael Chevalier praised New York as the "Queen of the Atlantic Coast." Even the otherwise virulent Mrs. Trollope found scarcely anything caustic to say about Gotham; in fact she praised it roundly. "I must . . . declare," she wrote, "that I think New York one of the finest cities I ever saw, and as much superior to every other in the Union (Philadelphia not excepted,) as London to Liverpool, or Paris to Rouen. . . . Situated on an island, which I think it will one day cover, it rises, like Venice, from the sea, and like that fairest of cities in the days of her glory, receives into its lap tribute of all the riches of the earth."⁴⁰

At the time Mrs. Trollope visited the city, 1831, New York far from covered Manhattan Island. The city was compact, extending from the southernmost point at the Battery north along the Hudson for about two miles and along the East River for approximately two and a half miles. Canal Street marked the northern limit in the late 1820's; beyond that were several separate villages--Greenwich, Chelsea,

Bloomingdale, Manhattanville, and Harlem--and scattered farms and elegant country seats.⁴¹ The streets were generally narrow and crooked, although a great deal of labor and expense had already been utilized to implement the regular broad and wide street pattern north of the old city. In 1828 lots could still be purchased in the present Times Square area for less than \$700; further north for as little as \$60.⁴²

The chief thoroughfare, which New Yorkers never tired of showing off, was Broadway. Running from the Battery north to Bleecker Street, Broadway was the most fashionable promenade in the Union. The Southern travel writer, Mrs. Anne Royall, visiting New York in the late 1820's, exclaimed: "It is impossible to give even an idea of the beauty and fashion displayed in Broadway on a fine day; the number of females, the richness and variety of dress, comprising all that can be conceived of wealth or skill, mocks description." Broadway shops were the "self-appointed dictators of fashion." Wheeler, Tryon and Derby, Brundage, or Elmendorf furnished the aspiring beau's clothes; boots were obtained from Kimball and Rogers; a St. John was the only acceptable hat.⁴³ Americans were fond of comparing Broadway to London's Regent Street. Foreign visitors were more fond of describing the scavenging pigs that still roamed the streets or uneven pavement. But most visitors were impressed. Mrs. Trollope wrote that "this noble street may vie with any I ever saw, for its



length and breadth, its handsome shops, neat awnings, excellent trottoir, and well-dressed pedestrians."⁴⁴

In her New York visit Mrs. Trollope was struck by the refinement and elegance of the city's upper classes. "We saw enough," she wrote, "to convince us that there is society to be met with in New York, which would be deemed delightful any where." Other accounts attest to the truth of this. A native New Yorker writing in the 1830's pointed out that "there is an old aristocracy in this city, which is not generally understood. There is no strata of society so difficult to approach or reach."⁴⁵ This aristocracy was composed chiefly of the leading mercantile families, most of whom had been established for a generation or more. The origins of these leading families varied; some such as the Beeckmans, Van Cortlandts, Dyckmans, or Brevoorts were of Dutch descent and were closely associated with the Hudson Valley manor lords. Upper class families of English stock included among others the Aspinwalls, Howlands, Kings, Wards, Grinnells, Macys, and Whitneys; of French Huguenot origin were such wealthy families as the Lorillards, Jumels, Laws, and Pintards. Collectively these old families composed New York's highest class, or what was generally termed Knickerbocker society.⁴⁶

The following description of Knickerbocker New York as it existed in the early 1830's was given by A. C. Dayton, himself a member of Knickerbocker society:

There were circles naturally formed by congeniality of tastes and similarity of daily occupation, which could not be entered by a mere golden key. The applicant for admission must possess the requisite affinities and bear the unmistakable evidences which, the world over, proclaim the gentleman by sentiment and education. This idea of aristocracy pervaded Gotham and was derived from the staunch Knickerbocker stock; it underlay and formed the foundation of New York society. The good old fathers and their Madames were great sticklers for form and ceremony; their ruffles and cuffs were starched, and unwittingly imparted to the wearers an air of dignified composure that would check the merest approach to familiarity from their juniors. . . .⁴⁷

At the period to which Dayton refers New York was small enough so that the leading members of society were well-known. "In 1830," a contemporary noted, "a New Yorker of no very extended acquaintance could tell the names of all the principle merchants, and where they lived."⁴⁸ The leading commercial persons were well-to-do, but few were extremely wealthy. Probably only one New Yorker was worth over \$1 million; that was the immigrant fur magnate John Jacob Astor whose estate was valued at several times that amount. The only others close to being millionaires were Robert Lenox, John Coster, Stephen Whitney, and Nat Prime.⁴⁹

The style in which New York fashionables lived in the early 1830's was comfortable, dignified, and often elegant. But lacking was the loud and lavish display of wealth which became common in the 1840's and 1850's. Few persons in this period felt socially compelled to maintain private equipages. Not until the mid-forties did a carriage and a liveried coachman become a symbol of high social status.

Abram Dayton could recall only two four-in-hand teams around New York in the early thirties; one belonged to John Hunt of Hunter's Island near New Rochelle, "a gentleman of leisure and large wealth"; the other was maintained by Henry Marx, a noted and dashing man-about-town known as "Dandy" Marx. Among others having private equipages were Philip Hone, the wealthy ex-mayor and diarist, and the distinguished Dr. Valentine Mott.⁵⁰

One reason for the scarcity of family carriages was the fact that most well-to-do New Yorkers lived in the lower part of the city, within walking distance of their offices or places of employment. Fashionable residences flanked Battery Park and Bowling Green. Here some of the oldest and wealthiest families lived, including the Primes, Whitneys, Clintons, Schencks, and Schermerhorns.⁵¹ Slightly further north in the area around City Hall Park other fashionable families dwelled. This was especially true after the Astor House opened on Broadway opposite the Park in May of 1836. This luxury hotel was the most elegant in America and the wonder of the age. Costing more than \$400,000, its marbled structure was six stories high, contained 390 rooms, and boasted of such extravagant features as gas lights, running water, seventeen bathrooms, and two showers. In this neighborhood lived such well-known families as the Hones, Motts, Carters, Haggerties, Austins, Beekmans, and Hosacks.⁵²



The mansions of Knickerbocker New York showed no great variety, and were rather humble compared with those built after 1840. Most were of brick with painted shutters. They were narrow and deep to fit the general pattern of city lots. On the first floor was found the formal living room, used only on infrequent occasions such as funerals and weddings, the kitchen, and the dining room. The second floor contained the commonly used parlour or sitting room where ladies would receive their callers, sometimes a library, and often a bedroom. The third floor was exclusively given over to bedrooms. The attic provided the servants' quarters, while the basement served as a nursery. Furnishings were ornate and, to present day tastes, gaudy; mahogany and rosewood, silk and satin, marble and gilt were found in abundance.⁵³

As New York's population grew and commerce flourished the lower part of the city was increasingly surrendered to business. Wall Street, Pearl Street, Water Street, and Broad Street were almost totally taken over by warehouses, shops, banks and offices. An exodus to the more northerly parts of the city was begun by people of fashion, which continued until well after the Civil War. As the rich moved further north, working-class persons began taking up residence in the vacated mansions of lower Manhattan. But where formerly one family had lived, twenty or fifty, or even one hundred were crowded.⁵⁴ Some well-to-do families, of

course, lagged behind in the northern migration and there developed that curious juxtaposition often commented upon by foreign visitors of mansions and tenements existing within a few blocks of one another or even side by side.

By the mid-thirties one of the most exclusive residential areas in the city was St. John's Park. This park bordering Hudson, Laight, Varick, and Beach Streets was owned in common by the abutting residents who had keys to the iron gates. A contemporary called it "one of the very highly aristocratic portions of the city."⁵⁵ But even this location proved too southerly as society continued its northern march. St. John's Park declined in prominence, and in 1869 the land was purchased by the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad. A depot and freight storehouse replaced the stately trees and winding walks.⁵⁶

In the late 1830's the rallying cry of fashionables was "above Bleecker." More splendid mansions than the city had yet known were built about Washington Square, along Fifth Avenue, University Place, Lafayette Place, and Astor Place. Union Square became a dignified residential area, and north of that the private Gramercy Park, established by Samuel Ruggles in 1831, was the site of a fashionable building boom. The "old down town burgomasters," noted Philip Hone in 1836, were "marching reluctantly north to pitch their tents in places which in their time, were orchards, corn-fields or morasses, a pretty smart distance from town."

Hone, himself, was no exception; he moved from the crowded lower city opposite City Hall Park uptown to a new location just south of Astor Place.⁵⁷

Certain institutions were traditional mainstays of aristocratic society in New York City. The Episcopal Church was such an establishment. As the tax-supported church in colonial days it was the church of the ruling class and the elite in general. This situation did not change with disestablishment. Episcopal churches in the city were well endowed, especially Trinity which was one of the major landholders in Manhattan. But the most elite congregation in the 1830's was that which gathered in old Grace Church at the corner of Broadway and Rector Street. Grace, in the words of a member, was "the chosen shrine of the crème de la crème, among that portion of society who especially affect the imposing ritual of Episcopacy."⁵⁸

Another institution which upheld New York society was Columbia College. From its founding as Kings College, Columbia had been closely associated with order, tradition, paternal benevolence, and the Episcopal Church. In political matters the college's leanings had been Federalist, and by the 1830's were Whig. Its trustees and presidents were almost always gentlemen of rank and wealth. The student body was comprised largely of the sons of New York's leading families.⁵⁹

One institution which became an aristocratic stronghold was the Union Club, organized in 1836 along the lines of an exclusive London club. Among the charter members were many of New York's most eminent citizens. The richly furnished clubhouse at 343 Broadway opened in 1837 with "good servants, and above all a most recherché chef de cuisine."⁶⁰ In the 1840's and 1850's the Union Club flourished and others were patterned after it. Prior to its founding select coteries of the city's society were in the habit of meeting on certain occasions in special rooms of the principle hotels. At Washington Hall and the City Hotel distinct social sets met. Although these gatherings were not formally organized they were as well defined and almost as exclusive as private clubs.⁶¹

Social life in New York revolved around elegant parties and formal balls, both privately given or run by subscription at one of the leading hotels. Hone describes a fashionable private party which, he assures his diary, was "quelque chose distinguée." The mansion in which the gathering was held Hone describes as the finest house in New York, "furnished and fitted up in a style of the utmost magnificence--painted ceilings, gilded moldings, rich satin ottomans, curtains in the last Parisian taste, and splendid mirrors. . . . On this occasion, all the science of all the accomplished artistes was put in requisition; decorators, cooks, and confectioners vied with each other, and each in

his vocation seemed to have produced the ne plus ultra.

. . . "62

Francis Grund wrote that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of American aristocrats was "their dislike of their own country."⁶³ This seems applicable to New York socialites who in many ways scorned anything American. These aristocrats aped European fashions in everything from the cut of their clothes to language and manners. A work of art or a style of dress was not favored with fashionable approval unless it was known to be in vogue in London or Paris.⁶⁴ New York advertisers capitalized on this by referring to the European success of their particular luxury product. For example Brewster, Lawrence, and Company, coachmakers, advertised "that in addition to their usual variety of work, they have now for sale Carriages, constructed on the English plan, and of the newest London fashion. . . ." ⁶⁵

Often at fashionable gatherings democracy and American notions of equality were ridiculed. "All that I have been able to see in the United States," wrote Grund, "convinces me that the wealthy classes are in no other country so much opposed to the existing government. . . ." "I have no objection to liberty in the abstract," commented a New York lady at a society soiree. "I think all men, with the exception of our negroes, ought to be free; but I cannot bear the ridiculous notion of equality which seems to have taken hold of our people. . . ." ⁶⁶ Abroad well-to-do Americans



desirous of receiving introductions to courts or to London's fashionable West End circles attempted to atone for American democracy by admiring every form of European despotism.⁶⁷

Socially aspiring Americans, in the words of a contemporary observer, "worship everything in the shape of a nobleman, until, by continually talking about nobility, they imagine themselves to belong to it." Anyone possessing a title was doted on. Persons went to great lengths to establish impressive geneologies; false coats of arms were hunted up or created; aging European portraits were purchased to form galleries of ancestors.⁶⁸

All this, of course, reflected the fact that class distinctions were at best tenuous. Trade, industry, and wild speculation flooded the ranks of the wealthy in the 1830's, and newly rich individuals, usually prodded by aspiring wives, craved social recognition. As a result the closed and established circles of New York society began to give way to a society-page "High Society," typical of wealthy industrialized countries.⁶⁹ Sheer display of wealth, often in a tasteless and vulgar way, became really for the first time a major means of gaining social notoriety and rank. James Kirke Paulding, the sophisticated Knickerbocker satirist, ridiculed this tendency among the New York rich:

Mr. _____ has a fine house, the inside of which looks like an upholsterer's shop, and lives in style. He gave me an invitation to dinner, at a fortnight's notice, where I ate out of a set of China, my lady assured me cost seven hundred dollars, and drank out



of glasses that cost a guinea a piece. In short, there was nothing on the table of which I did not learn the value, most especially the wine, some of which mine entertainer gave the company his word of honour, stood him eight dollars a bottle, besides the interest, and was half a century old.⁷⁰

Since social rankings were precarious, people competed recklessly to be in the "Best Society." Individuals who had "arrived" were jealous of their position and attempted to keep others from achieving an equal status. This made High Society very cutthroat. "It is almost impossible for an educated European," wrote Grund, "to conceive the degree of rudeness, insolence, and effrontery, and the total want of consideration for the feeling of others, which I have often seen practised in what is called the 'first society' of the United States."⁷¹ Aristocracy became in many respects nothing but a wealthy overgrown bourgeoisie, composed of persons who had been more successful in business than their fellow citizens.

But this is not to imply that class divisions were lessening or that aristocracy was declining. New York society was probably less democratic in Jackson's time than in Washington's. By then there were substantial commercial fortunes, factories, the beginnings of an urban proletariat, and a class-conscious labor movement.⁷² Aristocracy in New York was in a state of transition. The class of gentry was declining, but the rise of the wealthy capitalists more than offset this. In the period between the Revolution

and the early 1820's New Yorkers had become more a homogeneous middle-class society. But after that period this trend was reversed. The growth of industrialization and the tendency to specialized larger scale production, the enormous increase in immigration, and the decline of the frontier as an effective safety valve were all factors in the increasing split between classes.



FOOTNOTES

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³S. H. Collins, The Emigrant's Guide to the United States of America (London, 1830), p. 49.

⁴Edwin Harrison Cady, The Gentleman in America (Syracuse, N. Y., 1949), pp. 6, 20-21.

⁵Francis J. Grund, Aristocracy in America (New York, 1959), p. 83; as early as 1808 John Adams had written: "We have one material which actually constitutes an aristocracy that governs the nation. That material is wealth." Quoted in Dixon Wecter, The Saga of American Society (New York, 1937) p. 108.

⁶N. T. Hubbard, Autobiography of N. T. Hubbard with Personal Reminiscences of New York City From 1798 to 1875 (New York, 1875), pp. 160-61; Joseph A. Scoville, The Old Merchants of New York, 5 vols. (New York, 1863-66), I, 14-15.

⁷Cady, The Gentleman in America, pp. 85-102.

- ⁸Cooper, The American Democrat, pp. 78-80.
- ⁹Grund, Aristocracy in America, pp. 10, 52, 170.
- ¹⁰See: The Working Man's Advocate, March 13, 1830.
- ¹¹Aristocracy in America, p. 145.
- ¹²Quoted in Clayton Mau, The Development of Central and Western New York (Rochester, 1944), p. 266.
- ¹³Travels in North America During the Years 1834, 1835, and 1836 (2 vols., New York, 1839), I, 65.
- ¹⁴James Arthur Frost, Life on the Upper Susquehanna, 1783-1860 (New York, 1951), p. 123.
- ¹⁵Henry Christman, Tin Horns and Calico (New York, 1961), p. 21.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 24.
- ¹⁷Alexander C. Flick, ed., History of the State of New York (10 vols., New York, 1933-37), VI, 292-93.
- ¹⁸J. Franklin Jameson, The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement (Boston, 1956), pp. 34-35.
- ¹⁹David M. Ellis, Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, 1790-1850 (Ithaca, New York, 1946), pp. 16-65; Edward P. Cheyney, The Anti-Rent Agitation in the State of New York, 1839-1846 (Philadelphia, 1887), p. 19.

²⁰William B. Fink, "Stephen Van Rensselaer, the Last Patroon" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1950), pp. 2-14.

²¹Cheyney, The Anti-Rent Agitation, pp. 19-20;
 ✓ Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, pp. 25-29.

²²Fink, "Stephen Van Rensselaer," pp. 247-51, 253;
 Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, pp. 232-33.

²³Fink, "Stephen Van Rensselaer," pp. 251-54; Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, pp. 233-34.

²⁴John Bach McMaster, A History of the People of the United States From the Revolution to the Civil War (8 vols., New York, 1883-1913), VI, 521.

²⁵Quoted in Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, p. 40.

²⁶Cheyney, The Anti-Rent Agitation, pp. 31-35;
 McMaster, History of the People of the United States, VI, 522-23.

²⁷From "The Helderberg War," an Anti-Rent ballad quoted in Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, p. 345.

²⁸Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, pp. 129-42, 190-95.

²⁹Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, pp. 272-75.

³⁰Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 313-18.



³¹Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, pp. 278-87, 292.

³²Ibid., p. 301.

³³Cheyney, The Anti-Rent Agitation, pp. 48-50; Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, pp. 306-310.

³⁴Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, pp. 302-303.

³⁵Ibid., p. 312.

³⁶Cooper, The American Democrat, pp. 92-102, 133-39; Cady, Gentleman in America, pp. 103-26; Cooper wrote three novels in which the doctrines of the Anti-Renters are denounced; these are: Satanstoe (1845), The Chainbearer (1845), and The Redskins (1846).

³⁷This phrase was coined by Washington Irving in this period. See: Van Wyck Brooks, The World of Washington Irving (New York, 1944), p. 314.

³⁸The Picture of New York and Stranger's Guide to the Commercial Metropolis of the United States (New York, 1828), pp. 153-57; I. N. Phelps Stokes, New York, Past and Present (New York, 1939), p. 78.

³⁹The story of New York's rise to economic supremacy is too familiar to detail here; it is best treated in: Robert Greenhalgh Albion, The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860 (New York, 1939).

⁴⁰Chevalier, Lettres Sur l'Amerique du Nord, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1837), II, 36, quoted in Bayrd Still, ed., Mirror for Gotham: New York as Seen by Contemporaries From Dutch Days to the Present (New York, 1956), p. 79; Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (New York, 1960), pp. 336-37.

⁴¹James Hardie, The Description of the City of New York (New York, 1827), pp. 146-47.

⁴²The Picture of New York and Stranger's Guide, pp. 139-57.

⁴³Mrs. Anne Royall quoted in W. S. Tryon, ed., My Native Land (Chicago, 1952), p. 54; Abram C. Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York (New York, 1897), p. 154.

⁴⁴Charles Dickens, American Notes of General Circulation (New York, 1942), pp. 393-95, 397-98; Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, p. 337.

⁴⁵Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, p. 339; Scoville, The Old Merchants of New York, I, 14.

⁴⁶By 1830 the term Knickerbocker was loosely applied to persons comprising New York's best society and not exclusively to those of Dutch descent. See: Scoville, The Old Merchants of New York, I, 10-15.

⁴⁷Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York, p. 196.

⁴⁸Scoville, The Old Merchants of New York, I, 9.

⁴⁹Ibid., I, 12.

⁵⁰Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life, pp. 313-16.

⁵¹Theodore Dwight, The Northern Traveller (New York, 1826), p. 22; Isaac S. Lyon, Recollections of an Old Cartman (Newark, 1872), pp. 6-8; Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life, pp. 30-38.

⁵²Charles H. Haswell, Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York (New York, 1896), p. 315; A. C. Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life, p. 97; Robert Riegel, Young America, 1830-1840 (Norman, Oklahoma, 1949), pp. 191-92.

⁵³Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, pp. 338-39; Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life, pp. xxviii-xxx; Riegel, Young America, pp. 185-86.

⁵⁴New York Panorama (New York, 1938), pp. 429-30; Haswell, Reminiscences, p. 332.

⁵⁵Haswell, Reminiscences, p. 243; Trollope, Domestic Manners, p. 338.

⁵⁶Trollope, Domestic Manners, p. 338, note 3.



⁵⁷Thomas Low Nichols, Forty Years of American Life, 1821-1861 (New York, 1937), p. 166; Stokes, New York Past and Present, p. 78; Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone (2 vols., New York, 1927), I, 202; Allan Nevins and Milton Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong (3 vols., New York, 1953), I, 262.

⁵⁸Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life, pp. 103-5.

⁵⁹Dixon Ryan Fox, The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York (New York, 1919), pp. 29-30.

⁶⁰Haswell, Reminiscences, p. 317; Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone (New York, 1936), pp. 214, 263.

⁶¹Haswell, Reminiscences, p. 317.

⁶²Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone (1936 ed.), pp. 110-11.

⁶³Grund, Aristocracy in America, p. 87.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 10, 55-59, 81, 115, 159; Carl R. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York, 1927), pp. 17-18.

⁶⁵The New York Journal of Commerce, March 27, 1830.

⁶⁶Grund, Aristocracy in America, pp. 131, 107; Chilton Williamson, American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy (Princeton, 1960), p. 283.

⁶⁷Francis and Theresa Pulszky, White, Red and Black (2 vols., London, 1853), I, 11.

⁶⁸Grund, Aristocracy in America, pp. 29, 92, 124-28.

⁶⁹Cady, Gentleman in America, pp. 18, 146;
Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, pp. 140, 149.

⁷⁰Quoted in Tyron, ed., My Native Land, p. 66.

⁷¹Grund, Aristocracy in America, p. 85.

⁷²Marcus Cunliffe, The Nation Takes Shape: 1789-1837 (Chicago, 1959), p. 177.

CHAPTER 4

TO THE NEW WORLD

We have been recently, before and during the famine, in Irish towns and cities, and we have no hesitation in saying . . . that there is more thorough Irish degradation in the single city of New York than in all of them put together. As to the peasantry of Ireland, let them be never mentioned in the same day with this degenerate lodging-house population; no amount of physical suffering ought ever be compared with the moral degradation of the transplanted city Celt, which our police reports exhibit every day of the week. . . . There is often a more intimate sympathy between the Alabama planter and his African slave than between a Yankee employer and his Irish help. The Irishman may by industry, put "something to 'the fore," but he never can in these old States become a proprietor, or feel that easy sense of equality, without which liberty itself is but the liberty of the Arab--the freedom of wandering over a social desert, where the barren privilege prevails without any of its real advantages.

American Celt [New York] 1855

No factor contributed more to the stratification of New York society than the heavy influx of foreigners in the three decades before the Civil War. By the forties and fifties mass immigration had created a more than adequate supply of cheap labor to man the expanding factories, to perform the heavy construction work, and to fill the need for domestic servants and other menials. Wealthy capitalists generally profited from the labor of immigrants, but for native workers these newcomers represented a threat to their

social and economic position. As foreigners came in increasing numbers wages for all workers often dropped or failed to keep pace with rising living costs. In New York and other cities and factory towns living conditions deteriorated to the point where the difference between the industrial slums of the Old World and those of the New virtually disappeared. Native Americans of all ranks tended to feel superior to new immigrants. This class-conscious feeling together with the obvious economic inferiority of the majority of immigrants presented a strong challenge to egalitarian America and came close to creating a permanent aristocracy and proletariat in the two decades before the Civil War. For these reasons an examination of the impact of immigration on New York society is essential in understanding the rise of aristocracy.

I

The population migration of the nineteenth century was one of the most phenomenal in world history. The chief phase of this mass movement was the emigration from Europe to the United States. During the nearly one hundred years between the Congress of Vienna and the outbreak of World War I no fewer than 30 million persons made their way across the Atlantic. The first great wave of immigrants came before the Civil War. Immigration picked up after the Napoleonic Wars, reaching a peak of over 2.5 million in the 1850's.¹



In the period between the Treaty of Ghent and Lee's surrender at Appomatox well over five and a half million persons forsook the Old World for the New, coming chiefly from western, northern and central Europe. Numerically the great flood of immigrants, after 1880 far outstripped the ante-bellum ingress, but relative to the total population, immigration during the two decades prior to the Civil War was the largest in American history.² The tremendous scale of the population movement greatly affected Europe and America. It was awe inspiring. As one Liverpool man noted in the 1840's: "It appears as if the whole country was going to America, mostly to the States."³

Historians are aware of the huge impact that the immigration of the 1840's and 1850's had on this country. However, scholars have not sufficiently emphasized the fact that for the first three decades of the nineteenth century immigration was not a major factor in American growth. This lack of newcomers up to the Jacksonian period had nearly as great an import on American society as the large influx of immigrants did a few decades later. At the time of the Revolution the population of this country was slightly over 3,000,000; by the first election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 the population stood at well over 10,000,000; yet less than 400,000 of this increase could be attributed directly to arrivals from abroad.⁴

The Napoleonic wars were the chief factor in limiting the number of foreigners entering the United States during the formative years of the young Republic. Between 1790 and 1815 less than 250,000 immigrants arrived, averaging about 10,000 yearly.⁵ With the return of peace to the Western world immigration immediately increased in volume only to be sharply checked by the economic recession which the United States experienced in 1819. Though the economy picked up quickly in the twenties, the dream of America as a land of opportunity had not yet captivated the imagination of lower class Europeans enough to stimulate a major exodus. For one thing the revolutions in transportation and industry which were soon to transform America and absorb numerous foreign workers were only beginning. Then too the trip across the Atlantic was long, dangerous, and costly. Finally, since the number of foreigners here was small in the twenties newcomers seldom had the consolation of joining friends and relatives on arrival, something which greatly eased the transition from European to American life for many persons at a later period. Because of these factors arrivals averaged less than 14,000 annually in the twenties. The type of immigrants tended to be more substantial farmers, merchants or craftsmen who were fairly easily assimilated into American life.⁶

The small scale of immigration up to the Jacksonian period allowed most immigrants to become Americanized. By

1830 the great majority of foreign born were naturalized citizens and had been absorbed into the expanding economy without causing drastic wage reductions.⁷ It is no coincidence that the great growth of political, social and economic democracy which culminated in the Jacksonian period took place at a time when European emigration to the United States was at a low point.

Periods of heavy immigration from colonial times until the restrictive laws of the 1920's have always increased class consciousness and class feeling. An aristocracy is only possible where an inferior group exists willing to perform the most menial tasks in society. Slaves, indentured servants, and redemptioners provided such a class in colonial times. The great influx of penniless Irish and Germans were to provide such a class in the 1840's and 1850's. During the early years of the New Nation the accidental circumstances reducing European immigration proved a strong stimulus to the growth of democracy, weakening aristocracy in America. By the time of Jackson, as Tocqueville and others observed, the United States was a more homogeneous middle class society than at any time previously.⁸

While the lack of large scale immigration was one of the underlying factors furthering the growth of democracy, it was during the Jacksonian period at a time when equality seemed triumphant that immigration picked up sharply. In the year that Jackson first won the presidency, 1828, some

30,000 registered passengers entered the United States. During the year Old Hickory was locked in a death struggle with Biddle's Bank in 1832, over 50,000 aliens arrived. After this the total fell below that figure only twice before the Civil War. Taking the 1830's as a whole, immigration reached nearly 600,000--almost quadruple that of the twenties. Already, by the end of the Jacksonian era increased immigration presented a clear challenge to the egalitarian ideals of American society. Yet this was only the beginning of the great pre-Civil War migration.⁹

The reasons for this phenomenal movement of peoples were many. In the eyes of lower class Europeans, the United States appeared not only as the most democratic state in the Western world, but also as a land of unbounded economic opportunity.¹⁰ The mythic proportions which these factors of "democracy" and "opportunity" acquired had a tremendous appeal to Europeans who were frustrated economically and socially in the more settled societies of the Old World. America was looked upon as a new Eden, a classless land of plenty where the individual was master of his own destiny. It is undeniable that the majority of persons contemplating emigration from Europe were drawn primarily by the hope of economic advancement. The reports of abundant cheap land and higher wages here were the greatest drawing points.

Knowledge of American opportunity would not have led to such an extraordinary emigration had it not been



for the strong discontent with existing European conditions. The period of the French Revolution had unleashed the spirit of progress and the hope of improvement in the European common man; yet many individuals found their yearnings frustrated. This made downtrodden Europeans more receptive to the idea of America as a promised land.¹¹ The remnants of feudalism were disappearing while more efficient methods in agriculture and industry were being introduced. For many middle- and upper-class citizens this meant vast new economic opportunities. However, for millions who were less fortunate these changes brought only suffering. The industrial revolution, developing first in England in the mid-eighteenth century and spreading from there to the Continent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, adversely affected skilled artisans by destroying the domestic system of manufacture. For thousands of workers these changes brought poverty, ill-health, and insecurity. Factory slums where workers toiled long hours for little pay became common and drove persons to emigrate.¹²

For those Europeans hoping to escape the evils of industrial life by remaining in rural areas life was equally difficult. The expanding urban-industrial society made more efficient methods of agricultural production imperative. Changes in the rural economy took a variety of forms. In England and the Scandinavian countries the enclosure movement which had been going on for several centuries ended the

communal system of agriculture and created larger and more efficient farm units. In Ireland and along the Rhine in southwest Germany a similar consolidation of holdings by large landowners took place. Small plots were replaced by spacious pastures. In the process many small farmers lost their holdings and were forced to become rural wage workers, to move to the new factory towns in search of employment, or to emigrate.¹³

The great majority of pre-Civil War immigrants were Irish and German. Without doubt the worst economic and social conditions in western Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century were found in Ireland. The nadir of Irish fortunes came when the potato crop failed in the mid-forties. In the fourteen year period from 1841 to 1855, about 1.6 million Irish fled the Emerald Isle for the United States, nearly one-fifth of the entire population.¹⁴ Second in numbers to the Irish were German immigrants. By the outbreak of the Civil War there were over 1.3 million German-born persons living in this country.¹⁵

Unlike the Irish, the great German immigration was not touched off by any single episode comparable to the famine. Probably because of this the German exodus was never the full scale flight from poverty and starvation that typified the Irish departure during the famine years. Even in the 1850's when Germans were entering the United States in record numbers, abject poverty was less common than with

the Irish. The New York City immigration reports revealed that the average German entering there in the fifties arrived with about \$125 in cash.¹⁶

II

Irish, German, and to a lesser extent English, French, and Scandinavian immigrants came to America attracted by a dream of equality and opportunity. But for many foreigners this dream remained unfulfilled or took on aspects of a nightmare. On the journey across the Atlantic immigrants suffered untold hardships from overcrowding, lack of ventilation and sanitation, and poor food. When disease spread among steerage passengers the mortality rate was often shockingly high. Reports of deaths on immigrant ships were frequent in the New York newspapers. "The packet ship Isaac Webb," reported the New York Daily Tribune in February 1851, "is detained at Quarantine, on account of sickness among her passengers, having had 47 deaths on the passage." A few months earlier the Tribune told the experience of a German immigrant family of five who all perished at sea except for a five-year-old girl.¹⁷ As might be expected the conditions on the ships coming from Ireland and Liverpool during the Irish famine were most notorious. These packets, often referred to as "coffin ships," were in the words of a contemporary "charnel-houses . . . in which cruelty to mere Irish ceased to be a sin."¹⁸

Presuming an immigrant survived the horrors of steerage passage his trials were far from over. Upon landing at its American destination the emigrant ship was besieged by runners in the employ of hotels and boarding houses, railroads, steamship companies, land agents, and other concerns hoping to profit at the expense of the foreigners. The following description of the system was given by the New York Daily Tribune, November 10, 1853:

Such a scene of confusion and violence, of cheating, and swearing, and noise, and plundering, I have never witnessed. . . . The whole tribe of runners, hackmen, and tavern-keepers were combined to fleece the immigrant and often to ruin or sell the virtue of the unprotected girls. The worst cheating was always with the luggage. Tickets would be sold at a fair rate, and then the luggage be charged by weight. Weight, of course, was an arbitrary matter with these strangers; so that the poor foreigner, what with his cart-hire, and luggage expenses, would lose his whole little property before getting out of the city.

The great majority of European immigrants entered this country through the port of New York. Between 1820 and 1860 an estimated 5.5 million aliens arrived in America; of this number over two-thirds entered by way of the Empire City. Nor are these figures complete since numerous immigrants entered New York after debarking on the New Jersey side of the Hudson.¹⁹ The prominence of New York as a port of entry had a great effect on the development of the Empire State. Undoubtedly the mass immigration of the 1840's and 1850's had a more significant impact on New York State society than on the society of any other state. According to the New York State Census of 1855, over one-quarter of all



the state's residents were foreign born. In New York City foreign born composed almost half of the population and other cities in the state had a comparably large percentage of foreign born inhabitants.²⁰

Persons arriving in New York were particularly preyed upon. The art of relieving the new arrival of his remaining money and possessions was a well developed science. Competition between runners, who were paid on a commission, was keen and often violent. One New Yorker described the runners as "big-fisted, double-jointed 'shoulder hitters,' who pride themselves on travelling through life 'on their muscle'; semi-savages of civilization, and far more dangerous than the real, inasmuch as they possess greater scope for evil. . . ." ²¹

Of the many thousand tenement houses that existed in New York none were worse than those which specialized in housing recently arrived immigrants. Once induced by runners or simple ignorance into one of these houses the newcomers seldom escaped the landlord's clutches until his resources were exhausted. There were many of these immigrant hostelrys in the area about lower Greenwich Street and in the vicinity of the East River docks. Most of them were also grog shops, thus further serving to keep the occupants in a state of poverty. A boarder's luggage was locked up, supposedly for safe keeping, but actually to keep it from its owner in case of default of payment. Not only were thousands of immigrants fleeced of their last savings, but they were also housed in

intolerable conditions. A writer in the 1850's described one of these boarding houses as being subdivided into countless closet-like rooms, "each one being filthy and noisome in the extreme, infested with all manner of vermin, and holding as many straw mattresses, ragged quilts, and dirty blankets as sufficed for the nocturnal requirements of the boarders--eight or ten of whom, without regard to sex or age, were crowded into spaces fit only for one or two."²²

Various attempts were made by private groups, the city and the state to aid and advise newly arrived immigrants. A German Emigrant Society was organized in the late 18th century; a similar Irish society was founded in 1841. In 1847, New York established the Board of Commissioners of Emigration. These societies adopted the methods of the runners, boarding immigrant ships in an attempt to give sound advice about such things as baggage, boarding houses, harpies, jobs, and rail or canal tickets. In addition to this the Board of Commissioners required the captain of a vessel to file a passenger list for each voyage and to put up a bond for each person or to pay \$1 per person to the New York City Health Commissioner to cover possible costs for hospitalization or relief.²³

These measures were of some help, but it was not until the Board of Commissioners acquired Castle Garden, the old fort at the tip of the Battery, as an immigrant landing depot in 1855 that the situation really improved.



This was the first successful means of combating the runners since they were not allowed within the confines of the castle without special permission. In the old fort the Board established railroad ticket offices, a money exchange, a city-run baggage delivery service, and a general information desk. Until immigration was put under Federal regulation in 1890 and Ellis Island came into use, those entering the United States via New York harbor first set foot in the New World on Castle Garden.²⁴

Despite the various private and public agencies to assist the immigrant, the lot of those landing in New York remained difficult. Nearly every guide book published for prospective European emigrants contained a note of warning not to linger in New York City. In 1832 an American author urged:

Never let the poor and destitute emigrant stop in New York--it will be his ruin. But let him push into the country: he may find employment somewhere, if he is honest and willing to work.²⁵

In 1850 a writer similarly cautioned prospective emigrants that "there will be very little likelihood of the stranger finding employment in New York, the place being already crowded with mechanics, labourers, and loiterers."²⁶ Later writers were even more emphatic in urging immigrants to avoid New York and other large cities.²⁷

This advice to "face toward the setting sun," as one emigrant agent put it,²⁸ was difficult to follow. The way in which foreigners thronged into the city and remained

alarmed many native Americans. During the famine year of 1848, the Alms House Commissioner lamented that "the City of New York seems to be the desired residence of all emigration."²⁹

The Irish were particularly prone to herding into New York and other east coast cities. The reasons that these agrarian peasants congregated in the cities are simple. Most arrived virtually penniless and to buy transportation to the West was more than they could afford. Even those with money for rail or canal tickets seldom could afford to purchase land. Furthermore, the antiquated farming methods of the Irish peasant, who seldom knew more than potato farming, were scarcely suitable to American conditions. Most of these former farmers had a horror of agriculture bred from their Irish experience. Added to this was the congeniality of living with their countrymen and having a Catholic Church in close proximity. As one Irishman put it:

There were old friends and former companions or acquaintances to be met with at every street-corner; and there was news to give, and news to receive--too often . . . in the liquor-store or dram-shop kept by a countryman. . . . Then the chapel was handy, and a Christian wouldn't be overtaken for want of a priest; then there was the schooling convenient for the children, poor things. . . .³⁰

By 1860 there were over 204,000 Irish in New York; they could be found throughout the city, but were concentrated most heavily in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Living in overcrowded tenements, cellars, or cheap lodging-houses, the

New York Irish formed an easily exploited menial class.³¹

German immigrants in general were quite different from the city-dwelling Celts. They tended to be more industrious, patient, and thrifty. Also many came to America with enough money to travel west and buy land. Because of this far more Germans than Irish went into farming.³² Nevertheless, thousands of Germans did press into Manhattan and other New York State cities. By the outbreak of the Civil War there were over 120,000 New Yorkers of German birth.³³ The sizeable German section of the city ran along the Bowery from Houston Street to 14th and east to 1st Avenue. In this area, known as "Kleindeutschland," language, dress, shops, schools and churches were all characteristically German.³⁴

The condition of the urban immigrants varied from nationality to nationality and individual to individual. But on the whole conditions were poor. The majority of New York's tenement and cellar dwellers were foreign born. One block in the notorious Five Points area in the 1850's is a good illustration. This slum block contained 812 Irish, 218 Germans, 186 Italians, 189 Poles, 12 French, 9 English, 7 Portuguese, 2 Welsh, 39 Negroes, and 10 native Americans.³⁵

In general the city's foreign born suffered from poor housing, lack of job opportunities, and discrimination. The lot of New York's minor nationality groups such as the Italians, Poles, and Portuguese was very difficult. The following description by a native American of Italian life

in the fifties reflects both the bad living and working conditions and native feeling of superiority:

Here [the Five Points area], in large tenement-houses, were packed hundreds of poor Italians, mostly engaged in carrying through the city and country "the everlasting hand-organ," or selling statuettes. In the same room I would find monkeys, children, men and women, with organs and plastercasts, all huddled together; but the women contriving still, in crowded rooms, to roll their dirty macaroni, and all talking excitedly; a bedlam of sounds, and a combination of odors from garlic, monkeys, and most dirty human persons.³⁶

Probably the Chinese lived under the worst conditions of any foreign group in New York. By the Civil War there were some 200 Chinese living in the city, eking out an existence by selling tea or candy or cigars. Sometimes they got a dock job, but were more likely to be beaten by the Irish or Germans for attempting this. One reporter described a Chinese rooming house with fifteen or more persons living in a tiny room with narrow shelves coming out of the wall for beds, such as were used as steerage births in ships.³⁷

By far the largest immigrant group in New York was the Irish. This horde, many of whom spoke no English, knew no trade, had little education and almost no money, came to form the largest unskilled laboring class in the city. A British immigrant commented on this in the 1850's. "The Celtic Irish," he wrote, "do very much more than their share of the hard work, and are by no means overpaid. A New Yorker will immediately compare the wages of the Irish labourer in Ireland and in America as a matter of cash; but the real

question is the sort of life that the labourer leads."³⁸

The sort of life that the Irish led in New York was hard indeed. Discrimination was an everyday occurrence as the commonly found phrase in job advertisements "no Irish need apply" indicates. As early as the 1830's it was customary to see such signs.³⁹ The type of employment open to the Irish was heavy construction work. "Who digs the canals of America, and builds the foundations of her railways?" asked a writer in the early thirties. "They are almost exclusively Irish labourers . . . ignorant, groveling, intemperate, addicted to fighting. They go from a bad condition on this side of the Atlantic, [the Irish side] to make themselves worse, if possible, on the other."⁴⁰ Besides supplying the hard labor for building internal improvements, they did much of the pick and shovel work within the city, excavating, levelling, laying out docks, quays, jetties, piers or slips, filling in waters, digging drains, wells, and sewers. The Irish supplied the labor for the construction of the Croton waterworks and aquaduct which first brought a fresh supply of water to New York in 1842, and for the building of the New York and Harlem Railroad, completed in the 1830's. As Charles Dickens remarked after seeing two Irish workers on Broadway during his 1842 visit: "It would be hard to keep your model republics going, without the countrymen and countrywomen of those two labourers. For who else would dig, and delve, and drudge, and do domestic

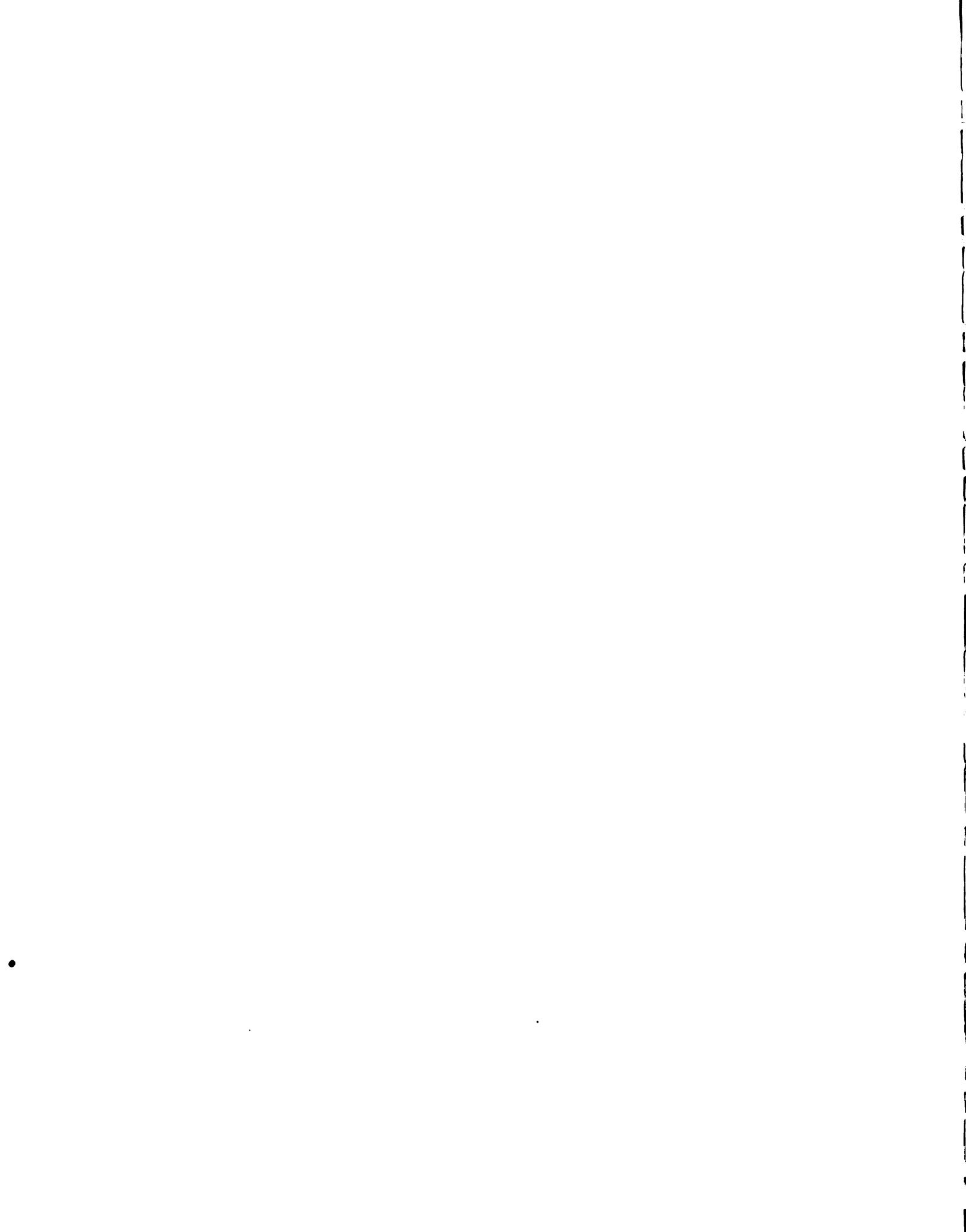
work, and make canals and roads, and execute great lines of Internal Improvements!"⁴¹

Other Irishmen found employment as longshoremen, cartmen, porters, or hodcarriers. Unemployment in these lines was common; it was not infrequent for a man to wait around a pier or a construction project for several days before finding a few hours work.⁴² Irish lads--"ragged, bare-footed, and pertinacious"--dominated the paper hawking profession, and were a familiar sight from dawn to dusk throughout the city.⁴³ Irish women filled the growing need for domestic servants while others found employment in the needle trades.⁴⁴

German-Americans in New York, Rochester, Buffalo and other cities were sometimes able to achieve a higher position than the Irish; a number were skilled artisans and found work in a variety of trades from bookbinding to violin making. But the fortune of the majority who remained in New York or other cities was nearly as bad as that of other immigrant groups. Charles Loring Brace, a writer on New York social conditions in the 1850's, was shocked at the poverty of many Germans living in East Side slums, earning a meagre subsistence by gathering and selling rags and bones. Brace felt the contrast to be very great between the clean farms of Southern Germany and the New World slums with "dirty yards piled high with bones and flaunting with rags, and the air smelling of carrion. . . ." ⁴⁵

Want among foreigners was commonplace. The Tribune of January 25, 1850, described "a large number of destitute immigrants" who out of charity had been housed in a basement hall of the police office at New York's Tombs Prison. "It was a sad and sorry sight," commented the Tribune reporter, "to witness these poor outcasts, who had expected a better state of things on their arrival in a foreign country, subjected to such misery." "Have we as a people," asked the Rev. Stephen Byrne, "paid sufficient attention to the proper establishing of ourselves in a state, not merely of prosperity, but of simple competency or independence in this great country? Let the crowded tenement-houses of the Eastern cities, where the very atmosphere is poisoned by the occupancy in one house of from twenty to forty families, and where morality itself is greatly endangered on account of associations that cannot be avoided, answer. Let the unnamed and unnumbered graves along the canals and railroads of the United States, answer. Let the forlorn and forgotten creatures who, having neither homes or friends, lie down and die in common hospitals of the country, answer."⁴⁶

One of the problems was that within the city the large numbers arriving from Europe in the thirties and increasingly in the forties and fifties glutted the labor market, causing both unemployment and lower wages than in the less populous areas of the country. Because of this, pauperism greatly increased in the period between 1830 and



1860. During the famine year of 1847 an estimated 100,000 persons received some form of public charity in New York; this was close to one-quarter of the city's population.⁴⁷ The following year the Alms House Commissioner reported that we have "in our midst, among the multitude of our population, a greater proportion of the truly necessitous, than any other place in the United States. The resort of the world must, of necessity, be the refuge for the poor. It is, therefore, our unavoidable lot to be compelled to contribute more largely to the cause of charity than others, and yet with all the extent of the City's bounty, how many pass their winters in the most appalling misery."⁴⁸ Nor was this simply a phenomenon of the Irish famine years. In 1855, New York State reported an all time high in the number of paupers treated at public expense, over 200,000. This represented a rise of more than 700 percent in twenty years. "Both in the City and State of New York," it was stated, "the proportion of poverty and pauperism is yearly increasing."⁴⁹ Commenting on the prevalence of poverty, slums, and bad working conditions in New York, a British writer and long time resident of Gotham declared that "it is curious and sad to see how young and insolent New York follows exactly in the tracks of old cities of effete, tyrannized, priest-ridden Europe--to use the language of young America; sometimes even going ahead."⁵⁰

Outside of the overcrowded confines of Manhattan Island the prospects of success were relatively better for the immigrant. The rate of dispersion of foreigners landing in New York City became more rapid in each succeeding decade from 1820 to 1860.⁵¹ Many settled within the state. In all the towns and cities from New York to Albany and from Albany to Buffalo following the route of the Erie Canal foreigners were to be found. After the completion of the Erie Railroad in the early fifties several hundred foreigners settled in the southern counties of the state, particularly Germans.⁵² Numerous Irishmen were to be found in the Northern Tier of upstate New York, many of whom entered this country via Canada.⁵³

Just how much better off, if at all, those who settled in rural New York were is hard to estimate. The overwhelming advice offered by writers of immigrant guide books was for the newcomers to settle in the country and take up farming. But, at least in New York State, it is questionable how sound this counsel was. For one thing, arable land near any of the major routes of transportation such as the Erie Canal was expensive. As early as 1820 an English immigrant somewhat exaggeratedly wrote home to his father that he did not intend to stay in New York State long as "the land is all taken up, and too dear for a person in my circumstances to buy."⁵⁴ An immigrant letter of 1829 stated that unimproved land seven miles from Utica was selling

for \$10 per acre; while a farm of 87 acres with buildings and largely cleared cost \$2,000 or approximately \$23 an acre.⁵⁵ In 1850 a traveller reported that improved lands in the Mohawk Valley near the canal cost as much as \$70 per acre. Even forty miles away from the canal land prices were as high as \$35 per acre.⁵⁶

Not only were land prices high, but economic opportunity in agriculture was not great for new farmers in New York State. Throughout the period under consideration, from 1830 to 1860, the percentage of the population engaged in agriculture was declining. As early as 1844 only 44 percent of the state's population carried on this occupation.⁵⁷ Many sections of the state could not have profitably absorbed a larger farm populace, and rural areas throughout these decades grew at a very slow rate. For example, a close study which a recent historian, James Frost, made of New York State's upper Susquehanna Valley reveals that by 1830 the valley contained 85,500 inhabitants, a number that was not surpassed until 1860 when 86,000 were reported.⁵⁸

Thus, the number of foreign born settling in New York State and acquiring their own farms remained relatively small. Very few Irish found themselves in this position. It has been estimated that less than ten percent of the Irish arriving in America prior to the Civil War engaged in agriculture, and of those who did the great majority did so as hired farm laborers.⁵⁹ English and German immigrants,

frequently having larger resources than the Irish, were more successful in husbandry and many did acquire farms in New York. The Yankee tendency to move on in search of new lands and opportunities very often placed improved farms on the market. German settlers became noted for following in the wake of Yankee migrations, taking up old farms and further improving them. German farmers tended to be hard working and thrifty. A farm to them was just that and not a land investment. Many through industry and the application of less wasteful farm methods than generally practiced in this country were able to make a living, though few became rich.⁶⁰

However, for the majority of immigrants remaining in New York State farming was not the solution to their economic problems. Many remained as impoverished as the New York City immigrant. One finds for example that the Irish around the state were generally employed in poor paying and unskilled non-farming jobs. They did the heaviest work for the least pay. They dug the canals and built the railroads; they provided a cheap labor force for the factories. In northern New York they lumbered and quarried; at Port Henry, Trout River, Clayton, Ausable Forks, and Rogersfield, they manned the iron mines. At Codyville, Black Brook, and Brasher Falls they worked in tanneries. Throughout central New York former Irish canal workers were settled. In Utica and Binghamton they did construction and factory work; in Syracuse they were employed in the salt



mines; at Onondaga they quarried. Except for the fact that the shack replaced the tenement, the position of the upstate Irish was not too different from those in the city.⁶¹

Similar comparisons could be made between other immigrant groups within New York City and elsewhere in the state. German settlers were found in large numbers in most of the upstate cities, especially Rochester and Buffalo. In the latter city the 1855 New York census reported 30,000 Germans out of a total population of 74,000.⁶² As in New York many Germans were successful as skilled craftsmen and mechanics, but more eked out a living as common laborers. Some of the German slums in western New York cities rivaled those found in Manhattan.⁶³

III

No historian would question that the mass immigration in the three decades from 1830 to 1860 had an overwhelming impact on American society, but there is a good deal of disagreement as to just what that impact was. One widely held thesis is that immigration, operating from below, has been a strong force for social mobility, helping to push persons from the lower ranks to higher social positions. As one of the leading historians of immigration, Oscar Handlin, writes: "Immigration . . . endowed the social structure with fluidity. In an expanding culture it was difficult to preserve fixed forms, to establish rigid class distinctions that might limit opportunities. Diversity and mobility

became characteristic features of life in the United States."⁶⁴

A contrary view is that mass immigration made it harder for an individual to climb the social ladder. In the words of the historian of the Irish movement, William Adams, with heavy immigration "the gulf between classes widened perceptibly, ushering in the modern age of acute class consciousness and the wage struggle." Supporters of this thesis contend that from a condition of fluidity the United States evolved during the two decades preceding the Civil War towards a state of stratification.⁶⁵ The evidence regarding New York State during the period from 1830 to 1860 can only lead one to the conclusion that this latter thesis is valid.

The effect of mass immigration on labor conditions is a good example. The great influx of foreigners led to a general reduction in workers' wages. In the mid-twenties an English immigrant living in Albany wrote to his father in answer to the father's questions about the prospects of emigrating to America:

I can't give you any good account about coming as yet, for there is so many Irish keep coming every day, and they work so cheap, that it makes it bad for laboring people.⁶⁶

This complaint was to be heard again and again, not only about the Irish, but concerning other nationalities as well. A writer in 1850 complained that Germans working for low

wages have "caused a great reduction in the price of labour." He described one German who arrived in Buffalo speaking no English and took a job chopping firewood away from a native American. Because of this sort of thing, the writer concluded, the Germans "are utterly disliked by the labouring Yankees, and, indeed by all except those who employ them."⁶⁷

Grumblings of this sort were not ill-founded. Wages for an unskilled laborer dropped from an average of \$1.00 per day in the early 1830's to less than \$.75 per day a decade later. Wages of skilled workers, although less affected, dropped also.⁶⁸ The idea sometimes expressed that immigrants only took jobs which native Americans scorned was simply not true. In many instances Yankee workers such as the Buffalo woodchopper were forced out of positions by foreigners willing to work for less, or else had to accept reduced pay. This was true not merely of unskilled jobs, but even in some of the craft trades.⁶⁹ As one newspaper writer bemoaned in 1844:

Our labouring men, native and naturalized, are met at every turn and every avenue of employment, with recently imported workmen from the low wages countries of the old world. Our public improvements, railroads, and canals are thronged with foreigners. They fill our large cities, reduce the wages of labor, and increase the hardships of the old settler.⁷⁰

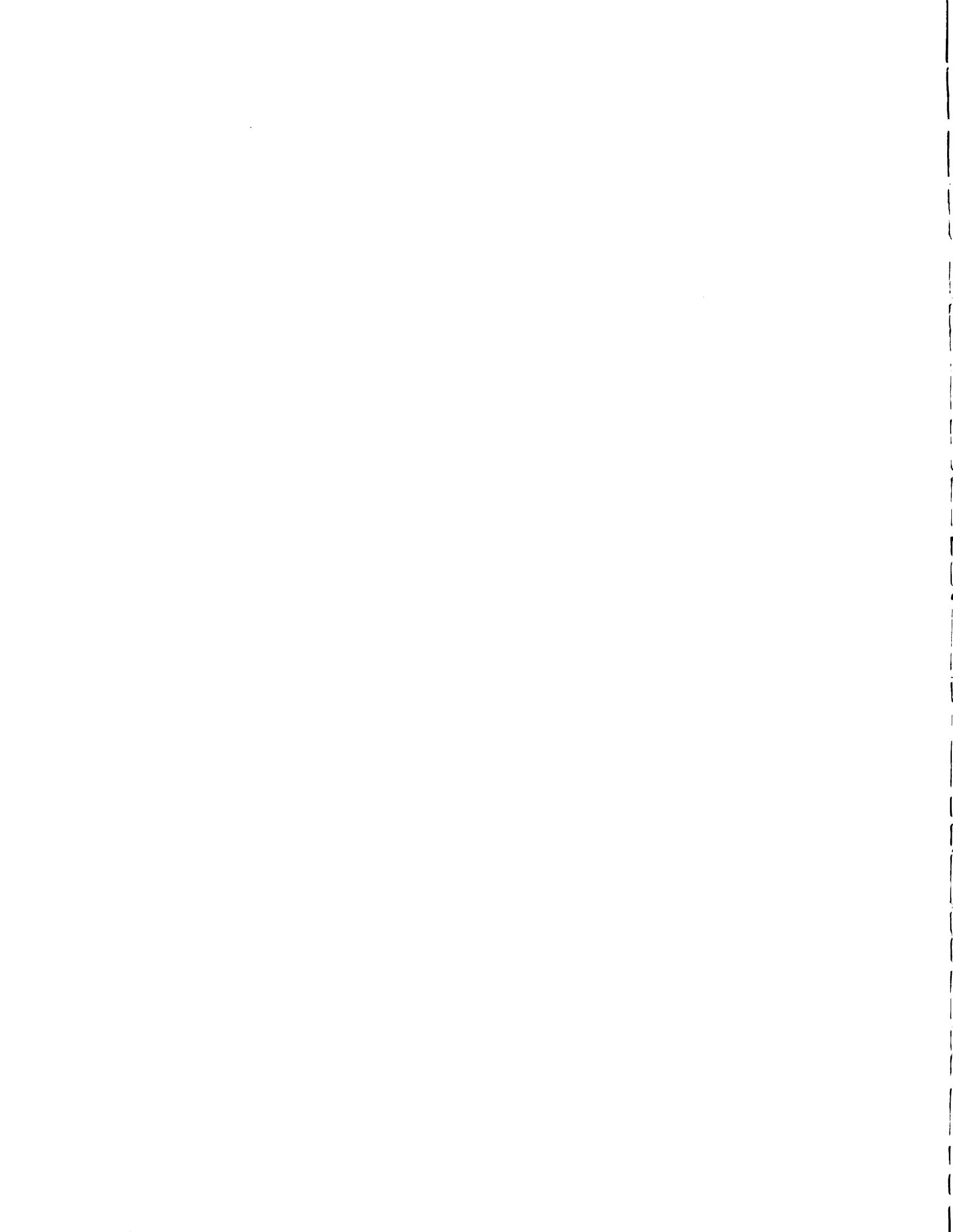
Much of the impetus underlying nativist reaction to immigration in the 1840's and 1850's was economic in nature.⁷¹

Heavy immigration also contributed to the boom-bust cycle of the American economy which greatly hurt the

laboring classes. During prosperous times such as the mid-thirties increasing immigration helped prolong the boom by keeping labor available and wages low. But once a depression set in as it did in 1837 and again in the late 1850's, its severity was much greater and longer lasting because of the numerous unemployed and destitute immigrants.⁷²

Large scale immigration also made unified action on the part of labor difficult. After the collapse of the New York labor movement in 1837, the increasing availability of low priced Irish and German laborers greatly hindered the effective revival of unions.⁷³ Similarly, this labor surplus tended to counteract the effect of cheap land and the frontier in drawing off workers from New York and other cities. After 1840 the vastness of the movement to America came close to creating a permanent semi-pauperized wage working class.⁷⁴

Not only political nativists, but Americans as a whole regarded recent immigrants as inferior beings, little better than the Negro. Immigrants, wrote a spectator of American society, "are singled out and kept apart from the mere circumstances of their birth, as a distinct and inferior caste--denounced in the degrading vocabulary of every native American, as unworthy of a more intimate fellowship with him, and in no wise fitted for the enjoyment of that rational freedom and independence, which at another time he claims as of man's inheritance--the inborn right of every



human being."⁷⁵ Even an Irish emigrant agent felt compelled to warn his fellow countrymen not to be too proud and think that America is a land of freedom where one man is as good as another. "It is true," he wrote, "that at the legal tribunal and at the voting booth all are equal, but there the equality ends. . . . Every demand for a fellowship with respectable society, grounded upon the law of the land, will be rejected with contempt. . . ."⁷⁶ This class feeling coupled with the fact that immigrants as a whole filled the most menial positions in society made social stratification more pronounced.

This is well illustrated by the changing status of domestic servants. Prior to the flood of foreign immigration in the 1840's and 1850's native Americans were mainly employed as domestic servants; they were called and generally treated as "help," not as servants, and class lines were not tightly drawn.⁷⁷ By the mid-forties the Irish came to form the most numerous and important group engaged in domestic employments. German women also entered this profession in growing numbers and by the early fifties were second only to the Irish. With the increased use of foreign born, class lines tightened and fewer native Americans entered into service. The term "servant" was once more introduced and the wearing of livery--the hated badge of servitude--became common. No longer was domestic service a temporary position; rather in New York and the lesser cities of the

state there came to be a semi-permanent class of domestic workers, serving the needs of the wealthier classes.⁷⁸

In other areas also immigration reduced social mobility, particularly for the immigrants themselves. Few first generation immigrants, unless they came to America with wealth or special skills, rose above menial, subordinate positions. They generally ate and drank better than in Europe, but, beyond this improvement, the ordinary immigrant could rarely rise. As a British resident in America wrote: "but a very limited proportion indeed of the numbers--the many thousands who annually migrate to the United States, ever reach to mediocrity, much less to affluence or station. . . ." ⁷⁹

Not finding in this country the promised plenty that they had been led to expect, many immigrants repented of ever having come to America. A Welshman living in New York wrote of his fellow immigrants: "The chief want and disadvantage which I saw among them was the scarcity of circulating money; they were ready enough to worship the DOLLAR, could they have seen one." "I have encountered many of my fellow-countrymen," he concluded, "who would go back to their native land if they could, but Oh! without having the means. . . ." ⁸⁰

After seeing the poor prospects for immigrants, Francis Wyse, a Britisher who spent several years in the United States during the 1840's, wrote a three volume work

on America, Its Realities and Resources which aimed at dissuading future Europeans from emigrating. Wyse was critical of the two standard economic motives for migrating to this country--cheap land and high wages. There was abundant land, he admitted, but the expenses and difficulties involved in creating a successful farm he found "almost insurmountable" for a poor man. As for wages, although somewhat higher than in England, Wyse found that much employment was seasonal and that living expenses were higher. All too often the immigrant was left "at the end of a laborious struggle, with scarcely any better prospects than when he first started; and certainly without making any very rapid advance in that independence, and increased wealth, which he was so confidently promised as a corollary to his labours at the outset."⁸¹

The second generation, of course, had better prospects of advancement than did their parents, but even here social and economic improvement was the exception rather than the rule. A study of the relative status of first and second generation immigrants in New York's predominantly foreign Sixth and Tenth Wards based upon the New York State Census of 1855 reveals that out of 201 second generation immigrants, largely Irish and German, only 44 or less than 22 percent attained a higher status than their parents.⁸² This is not to say that pre-Civil War immigrants did not eventually rise; the Civil War helped the Irish and Germans



both economically and socially. But generally it was not until the massive foreign influx from Southern and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century that the older immigrant groups made substantial improvements.⁸³

New York's upper classes were not threatened by immigration. Rather it was the reverse; large scale immigration bestowed prosperity on them. From the mid-forties on the newcomers brought a seemingly endless supply of unskilled, cheap labor, making possible the full introduction of factory production to the profit of some, but to the detriment of both native and foreign laborers. Yearly more and more workers found themselves in the category of permanent wage earners while social positions became more fixed and distinct.⁸⁴



FOOTNOTES

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²Jones, American Immigration, pp. 93-94.

³The Emigrant's Hand-Book and Guide to the United States (London, undated [1840's]), p. 3.

⁴Carl Wittke, We Who Built America (Cleveland, 1957), p. 101; Carl R. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York, 1927), p. 109; Jones, American Immigration, p. 93.

⁵Nelson M. Blake, A History of American Life and Thought (New York, 1963), p. 162.

⁶William J. Bromwell, History of Immigration to the United States (New York, 1856), p. 15; Wittke, We Who Built America, pp. 130-131; Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, pp. 107-119.

⁷William F. Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World From 1815 to the Famine (New Haven, 1932), p. 353.

⁸See: Gilman Ostrander, The Rights of Man in America, 1606-1861 (Columbia, Mo., 1960), pp. 156-58.



⁹Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, pp. 120-121; John R. Commons and others, History of Labour in the United States (4 vols., New York, 1918-35), I, 412-13; Jones, American Immigration, p. 93.

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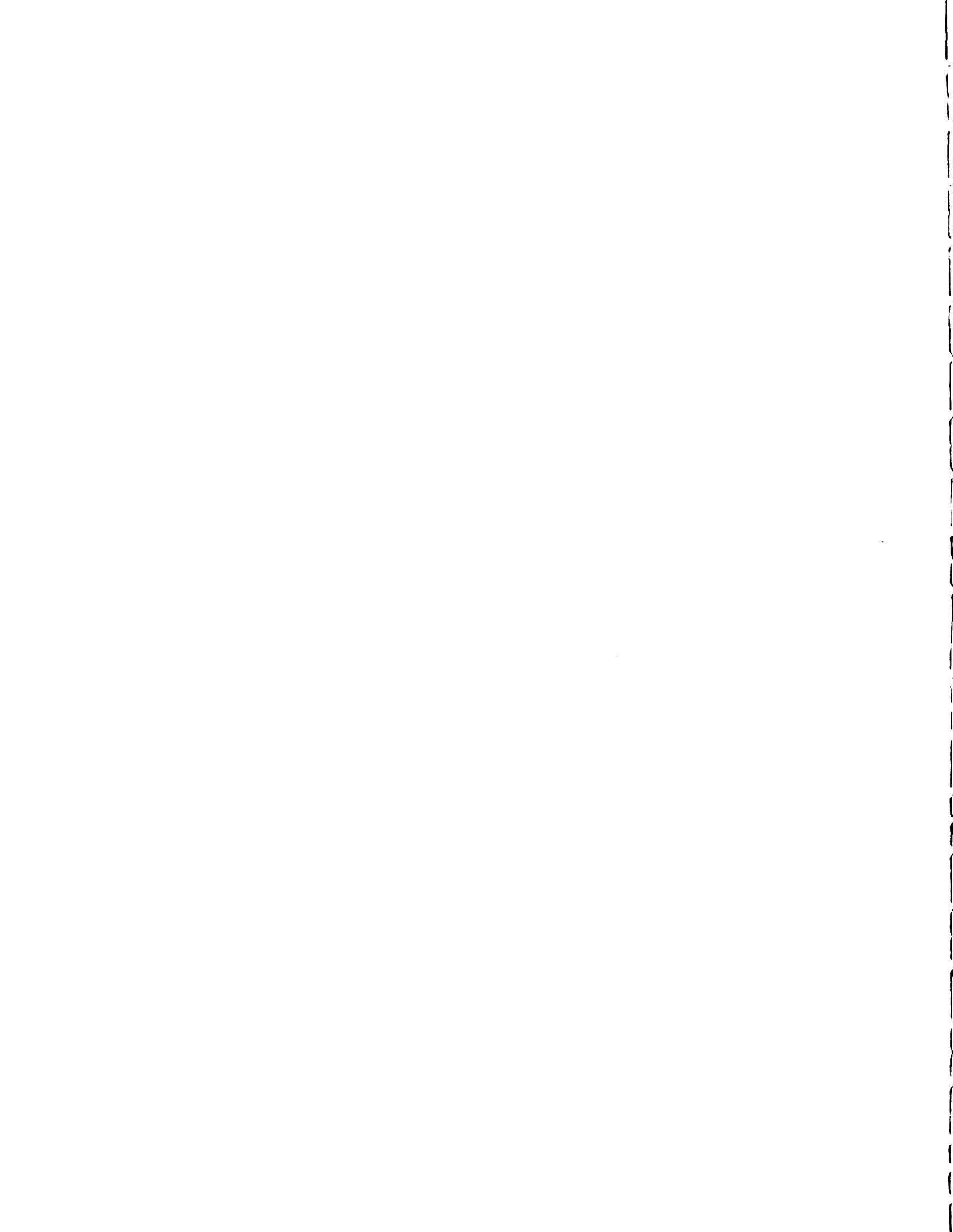
¹¹Ibid., p. 162.

¹²Jones, American Immigration, p. 96; Robert Ernst, Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863 (New York, 1949), pp. 2-3.

¹³Blake, A History of American Life and Thought, p. 163; Ernst, Immigrant Life, pp. 3-6; David M. Ellis et al., A Short History of New York State (Ithaca, 1957), p. 282.

¹⁴Jesse Chickering, Immigration into the United States (Boston, 1848), p. 59; Jones, American Immigration, pp. 95-96; Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, pp. 17-24, 199-200, 242-48; Wittke, We Who Built America, 129-131; Thomas D'Arcy McGee, A History of the Irish Settlers in North America (Boston, 1852), pp. 136-136; Oscar Handlin, ed., Immigration as a Factor in American History (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1959), p. 22; Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration, p. 391.

¹⁵Blake, History of American Life and Thought, pp. 169-70.



¹⁶Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, pp. 284-94; Wittke, We Who Built America, pp. 187-99; Blake, History of American Life and Thought, p. 171; John A. Hawgood, The Tragedy of German-America (New York, 1940), p. 57.

¹⁷New York Daily Tribune, February 19, 1851, September 23, 1850; Horace Greeley wrote a series of scathing editorials on immigrant ship conditions: see New York Daily Tribune, November 19, 22, 26, and December 3, 1853.

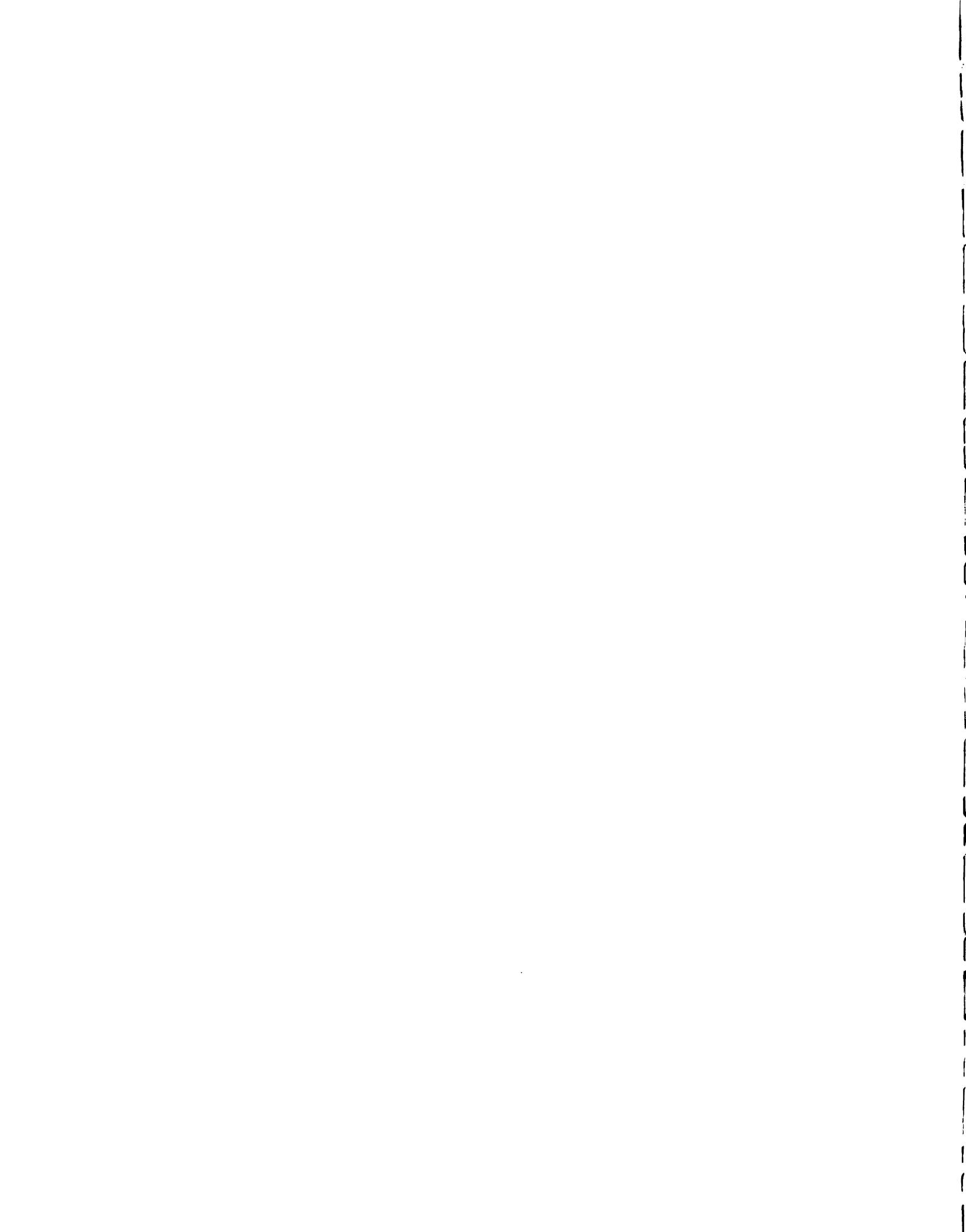
¹⁸Stephen Byrne, Irish Emigration to the United States (New York, 1873), p. 20; one of the most vivid accounts of immigrant ship horrors is William Smith, An Emigrant's Narrative; or a Voice from the Steerage (New York, 1850); see also: John Francis Maguire, The Irish in America (London, 1868), pp. 134-45, 179-83; Edith Abbott, ed., Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records (Chicago, 1924), pp. 13-42.

¹⁹Alexander C. Flick, ed., History of the State of New York (10 vols., New York, 1933-37), VII, 42-43. 55-58; Blake, A History of American Life and Thought, p. 166.

²⁰Ellis et al., Short History of New York State, pp. 281-84; Chickering, Immigration into the United States, pp. 5-10, 35-36.

²¹Thomas Butler Gunn, The Physiology of New York Boarding-Houses (New York, 1857), p. 266.

²²Ibid., pp. 263-70; Ernst, Immigrant Life, pp. 27-29, 37.



²³Wittke, We Who Built America, pp. 126-26; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VII, 53; for a contemporary account of the working of the Board of Commissioners of Emigration see: Thomas Mooney, Nine Years in America (Dublin, 1850), p. 79.

²⁴Ernst, Immigrant Life, p. 31; Wittke, We Who Built America, pp. 126-27; for an excellent contemporary view of the helpfulness of Castle Garden see: James D. Burn, Three Years Among the Working-Classes in the United States During the War (London, 1865), pp. 284-85.

²⁵Calvin Colton, Manual For Emigrants to America (London, 1832), p. 55.

²⁶[George Nettle], A Practical Guide for Emigrants to North America (London, 1850), p. 24.

²⁷See: Maguire, The Irish in America, p. 214.

²⁸Mooney, Nine Years in America, p. 39.

²⁹Annual Report of the Alms House Commissioner For the Year 1848 (New York, 1849), p. 4.

³⁰Maguire, The Irish in America, p. 215; Jones, American Immigration, pp. 121-22.

³¹Bayard Still, ed., Mirror for Gotham (New York, 1956), p. 129; Ellis et al., Short History of New York State, p. 283.

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³⁴Still, ed., Mirror for Gotham, pp. 160-63; Wittke, We Who Built America, pp. 198-99.

³⁵Matthew Hale Smith, Sunshine and Shadow in New York (Hartford, 1868), p. 205.

³⁶Charles Loring Brace, The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them (New York, 1872), pp. 194-97.

³⁷Gunn, The Physiology of New York Boarding-Houses, pp. 270-76.

³⁸D. W. Mitchell, Ten Years in the United States (London, 1862), pp. 147-48.

³⁹"A Few Weeks in New York," by a returned immigrant, The New Monthly Magazine and Humorist, XLVIII, pt. 3 (1836), 358.

⁴⁰Colton, Manual for Emigrants, p. 64.

⁴¹American Notes For General Circulation (New York, 1942 ed.), p. 394; see also: The Emigrant's Handbook, p. 27; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VII, 41.

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⁴³Charles Mackay, Life and Liberty in America (New York, 1859), p. 21.

⁴⁴Thomas L. Nichols, Forty Years of American Life, 1821-1861 (New York, 1937), p. 255; Ernst, Immigrant Life, pp. 66-69.

⁴⁵The Dangerous Classes of New York, p. 147; Wittke, We Who Built America, p. 199.

⁴⁶Irish Emigration, p. 12.

⁴⁷Annual Report of the Alms House Commissioner for 1847, p. 7; S. H. Collins, Emigrant's Guide to the United States of America (London, 1830), p. 68; The Emigrant's Hand-Book, p. 39; Maguire, The Irish in America, pp. 217-18.

⁴⁸Annual Report of the Alms House Commissioner for 1848, p. 44.

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⁵²Hawgood, The Tragedy of German-America, p. 80.

⁵³Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VII, 42.

⁵⁴John Watson, Seneca, New York to Stephen Watson, Sedlescomb, England, August 13, 1820, in: [Smith, ed.], Twenty-Four Letters From Labourers, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁵Collins, Emigrant's Guide, p. 116.

⁵⁶Mooney, Nine Years in America, p. 100.

⁵⁷Adna F. Weber, The Growth of Industry in New York (Albany, 1904), p. 20; Robert Riegel, Young America, 1830-1840 (Norman, Okla., 1949), p. 97.

⁵⁸Life on the Upper Susquehanna, pp. 13-16, 90-91.

⁵⁹Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration, p. 341.

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⁶¹Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VII, 31-41, 5, 166.

⁶²Ellis et al., Short History of New York State, p. 284.

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⁶⁴Immigration as a Factor in American History, pp. 2-3; see also: David M. Potter, People of Plenty (Chicago, 1954), pp. 94-95.



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⁶⁶[Smith, ed.], Twenty-Four Letters from Labourers in America, p. 14.

⁶⁷[Nettle], A Practical Guide for Emigrants, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁸Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration, pp. 340-41.

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⁷³Norman Ware, The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860 (Boston, 1924), p. 10; Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration, p. 355.

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⁷⁵Francis Wyse, America, Its Realities and Resources (3 vols., London, 1846), I, 51.

⁷⁶Mooney, Nine Years in America, pp. 87-88.

⁷⁷See Chapter I, pp. 4-6.

⁷⁸Lucy M. Salmon, Domestic Service (New York, 1897), pp. 62-65, 70-72; Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, p. 113; Nichols, Forty Years of American Life, p. 255.

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⁸⁰Rowland T. Berthoff, ed., "Life in America: A Disillusioned Welshman in New York," New York History, XXXVII (January 1956), pp. 80-84.

⁸¹America, I, 40-41.

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⁸³Thomas, Migration and Economic Growth, pp. 152-53.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 32, 153-54.

CHAPTER 5

FACTORIES AND FORTUNES

As the conditions of men constituting the nation become more and more equal, the demand for manufactured commodities becomes more general and more extensive; and the cheapness which places these objects within the reach of slender fortunes becomes a great element of success. Hence there are every day more men of great opulence and education who devote their wealth and knowledge to manufactures; and who seek, by opening large establishments, and by strict division of labour, to meet the fresh demands which are made on all sides. Thus, in proportion as the mass of the nation turns to democracy, that particular class which is engaged in manufactures becomes more aristocratic. Men grow more alike in the one--more different in the other; and inequality increases in the less numerous class, in the same ratio in which it decreases in the community.

--Alexis de Tocqueville,
Democracy in America, 1840

By the eve of the Civil War, America had passed through the most important early stages of the Industrial Revolution. In 1840 the total value of manufactured goods produced in the United States was less than \$500 million; twenty years later this figure stood at nearly \$2 billion and this country was well on the way to becoming the world's leading industrial nation.

The impact of industrialization on New York society was very great in the three decades before the Civil War.

The spread of factories hastened the decline of domestic and craft shop manufacturers. The demand for skilled artisans lessened while the ranks of the unskilled were filled with recent immigrants. Cities multiplied, experiencing their greatest relative growth in the nation's history during the 1840's and 1850's. In the latter decade New York became the first American city to pass the 1 million mark. These changes made all the problems associated with an urban-industrial society clearly apparent. Slums, crime, and filth spread in the burgeoning cities. The persistent encroachment of machines and mass production made workers in the skilled trades feel severely threatened. As factories grew there was a steady trend toward concentrating production in larger and larger units controlled by absentee owners. "The wealthy monopolists," complained a reporter in 1849, "are anxious to crush those who are doing a small business and get them out of the way, in order that they may fix prices to suit themselves."¹ Industrialization caused class lines to tighten and class consciousness to increase. Great wealth was created through manufacturing, but it was seldom shared by the growing number of factory operatives who showed signs of becoming a permanent class of wage workers. At the other extreme, the triumph of industrialization created a new capitalist aristocracy whose fortunes and power far outstripped that of any earlier elite group in America.

I

The real beginning of the factory system in New York, as in the country at large, came during the Napoleonic Wars. Cut off from imports by the restrictive legislation of Jefferson and Madison and eventually blockaded by Britain following the outbreak of war in 1812, Americans were forced to manufacture their own commodities. Many well-to-do merchants and shippers, suffering from the drop in trade, turned to manufacturing for the first time. By the end of the War of 1812, the factory system had a foothold in the state of New York.²

America's infant factories faced a severe test after 1815. British merchants and manufacturers anxious to regain the American market and nip American companies in the bud dumped enormous quantities of goods in this country at low prices. As Henry Brougham said in Parliament: "It is worth while to incur a loss upon the first exportation in order, by a glut, to stifle in the cradle those rising manufactures in the United States which the war has forced into existence contrary to the natural course of things."³ Importations rose in value from \$13 million in 1813 to \$147 million in 1816. The bulk of these goods entered the United States by way of New York harbor. This caused a brisk rise in New York's commercial activity and was particularly advantageous to auction companies. But many of the manufacturing firms

within the city and the state seemed doomed because of this British competition.⁴

To offset the glut of British goods on the American market manufacturers beseeched the state and national governments for relief. An American Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Manufacturers was established in New York City in 1816 to argue in favor of protective tariff. From Oneida County a group of cotton and woolen manufacturers warned that an investment of \$600,000 was endangered. Elsewhere in the state similar complaints from manufacturing interests were heard.⁵ Strong post-war nationalism together with the lack of organized opposition to tariff protection led to the passage by Congress in 1816 of the first avowedly protective tariff in American history.

In 1824 and again in 1828 the tariff was revised upward. The "Tariff of Abominations" of 1828 was the high-water mark of pre-Civil War protection; after this, strong opposition from the Southern planters and other agrarian and commercial interests necessitated compromise between protection and free trade concepts, but even with the lower tariff duties of 1833, 1846, and 1857 the principle of protection of domestic industry was maintained to the benefit of manufacturers in New York and elsewhere.⁶

Although manufacturing in the Empire State suffered from the fact that New York City was the nation's chief commercial and importing center, the state itself was farsighted



in aiding manufacturing interests. Well before the close of hostilities with Britain in 1815, New York State had adopted a policy of patronizing industrial interests. As early as 1790, the legislature granted an earthenware manufacturer a loan, declaring that "the establishment of useful manufactures is closely connected with the public weal" and that "it is desirous to encourage the same."⁷ Legislative loans to individuals or corporations engaged in manufacturing became fairly common. Between 1812 and 1816, for example, twenty-eight state loans were authorized amounting to \$143,500; these went chiefly to firms making cotton and woolen cloth and iron and steel products.⁸

Another state aid to manufacturers was the passage of a general incorporation law in 1811. New York was the first state to enact such a measure. The 1811 law allowed manufacturing firms to be chartered providing they filed certain basic information and their capital was not over \$100,000. Prior to this, special legislative acts were necessary to create a corporation, and the corporate form of business enterprise was used primarily in public fields such as banking, utilities, transportation, and insurance. The law of 1811 allowed manufacturers to take advantage of the corporate structure; between that date and 1818, one hundred and twenty-nine charters were granted to New York manufacturing firms. By 1830 a fair number of firms had incorporated, many of which were capitalized at well over the original

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial statements. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses and income. The document provides a detailed list of items that should be tracked, such as inventory levels, accounts receivable, and accounts payable. It also outlines the procedures for reconciling these accounts and identifying any discrepancies.

The second part of the document focuses on the classification of expenses. It explains how to distinguish between capital expenditures and operating expenses, and how to allocate costs to different departments or projects. This section includes a table with columns for expense type, amount, and department, which is used to organize and analyze the data. The document also discusses the importance of reviewing these records regularly to identify trends and areas for improvement.

The final part of the document provides a summary of the key points and offers some practical advice for implementing these procedures. It stresses the need for consistency and accuracy in record-keeping, and encourages the use of standardized formats and codes to facilitate data entry and analysis. The document concludes by noting that thorough record-keeping is essential for making informed business decisions and ensuring compliance with legal requirements.

\$100,000 limit.⁹

The completion of the Erie Canal announced by a relay of cannons from Buffalo to New York on October 26, 1825, opened a new chapter in the state's history. The great success of Governor DeWitt Clinton's famed ditch not only started a national boom in canal construction, but also speeded up the Industrial Revolution by opening up vast new markets to manufactured goods. The Canal stimulated manufacturing along its entire route. In the West primary manufactures such as Grain and saw milling were encouraged, while in the East secondary manufactures such as the making of boots and shoes, vehicles, implements, stoves and textiles were given a boost. It is significant to note that for several decades after 1825, the Great Lakes Basin developed no industrial towns comparable to Pittsburgh, Lexington, and Cincinnati along the Ohio River system. The Great Lakes region remained dependent on New York City and the manufacturing districts located along the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys to supply the kind of articles that the Ohio River cities furnished to the settlers of the Mississippi Valley. The Canal started in motion a current of trade highly favorable to a variety of industries along its course and in New York City. From the West came an endless supply of raw materials--iron, lead, wool, leather, lumber, grain, ore, and potash. Less than one percent of the west to east canal freight was classified as manufactured and this included a good deal of

whiskey, while the overwhelming cargoes hauled from east to west were manufactured products.¹⁰

By the late 1820's manufacturing in the Empire State was thriving. James Hardie, in a book on New York City written in 1827, boasted that the city's yearly output of cotton cloth had risen from less than 3,000 yards in 1812 to nearly 1,175,000 yards in 1825. "Other factories," he reported, "have advanced in at least an equal ratio, and new ones are almost daily springing into existence."¹¹ Five years after another New Yorker exclaimed:

The whole region, from east to west of this State, presents one bustling, stirring, scene, not unlike a May-day hive of bees--all moved to activity by their connexions with the city of New York, which receives their products, and renders them their delicacies.¹²

During the mid-1820's the profits of shippers and commercial auctioneers declined as prices dropped. For one thing the formerly lucrative China trade went into a slump as the markets for oriental luxury goods became saturated. Shippers and merchants began investing in other enterprises among which manufacturing was important. Between 1826 and 1830 John Jacob Astor took his money out of ocean commerce. In 1834 he invested \$60,000 in Philip Hone's Matteawan Company to expand its textile mills.¹³ Hone, the fashionable ex-Mayor, was himself an example of a person who having made his fortune in the New York auction business invested his funds chiefly in mining, manufacturing, and transportation.¹⁴ Many other merchants and shippers began employing their capital similarly.

In Jacksonian New York the factory system was not yet dominant. In all but a few industries handicraft and domestic production prevailed. However, the days of the craft shop and home manufacturing were numbered. Until the nation-wide depression of the late thirties caused a temporary setback, factory production grew rapidly. By the mid-thirties in the manufacture of textiles, clothing, and shoes the factory had surpassed the craft shop and the home.¹⁵ The largest factories in the thirties were those producing cotton textiles. Large mills were located along streams in Washington, Rensselaer, Ostego, Columbia, Dutchess, and Oneida Counties. One of the most substantial operations was located in Troy where in 1826 Benjamin Marshall, a wealthy New York merchant, had set up the Hudson River Print Works and the Ida Mills. These two plants united cotton making, printing, and turning out finished clothing. The quality of the fabrics loomed at the Marshall works was said to be as fine as any in the country and comparable to the most expensive imported cottons.¹⁶

In 1831 New York had 112 cotton mills; only Massachusetts with 250 and Rhode Island with 116 had more. Already there was a tendency for larger mills to dominate the industry. The textile factories established at Cohoes on the Mohawk north of Albany were an example. In 1836 a group of New York City capitalists headed by Peter Harmony and

including among others H. J. Wyckoff and Peter H. Schenk incorporated the heavily capitalized Harmony Cotton Manufacturing Company there. By 1840 this was the state's largest cotton manufacture.¹⁷

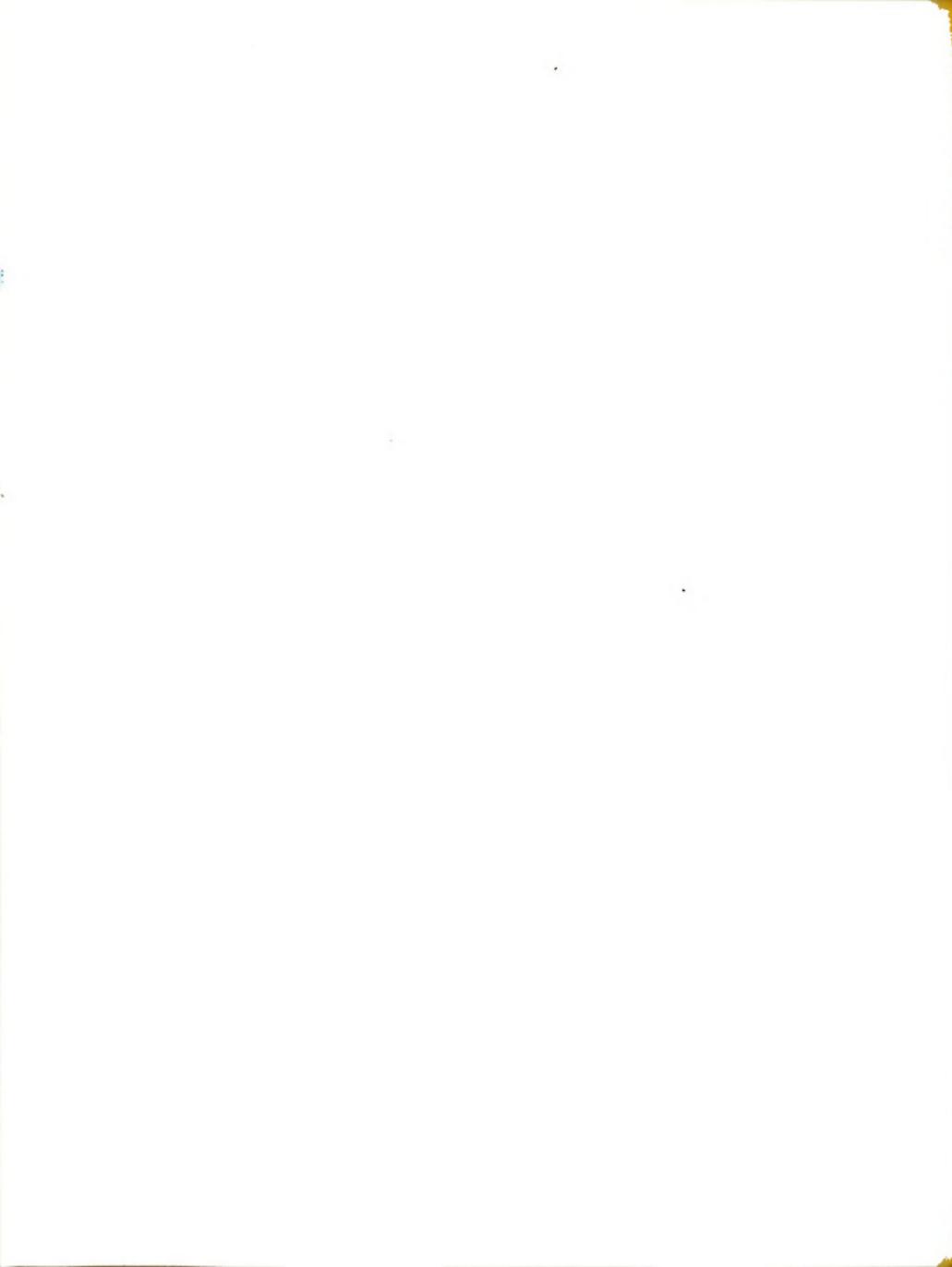
New York's woolen production similarly came to be established firmly on a factory basis in this period. In 1831 the state's woolen mills taken collectively were capitalized at nearly \$900,000 and employed over 1,200 workers. Nine years later in 1840, the woolen factories showed a significant increase. By the later date these mills represented a capital investment estimated at about \$3.5 million and employed nearly 4,650 workers.¹⁸ This rapid gain in the wool industry was made while the number of factories was decreasing, illustrating the tendency of the larger concerns to dominate the field. In Dutchess, the leading wool producing county, the number of fulling mills declined from 117 in 1821 to 15 in 1840.¹⁹

As factory production came to dominate the textile industry household manufacture markedly dropped off. According to the New York State census of 1825, the total household manufacture of textiles amounted to approximately 16.5 million yards annually, which was nearly 9 yards per capita. Ten years later the census reported that less than 9 million yards were produced in the home, slightly more than 4 yards per person. By 1855 less than 930,000 yards of homespun were reported as having been produced; this



represented about a fourth of a yard per person.²⁰ These statistics give a good indication of what happened as the factory came to dominate a particular industry. By the fifties, not only in textiles, but in every other field, household manufactures were almost wholly superseded by factory-made goods.²¹

Along with the decline of household manufactures small craft shops also waned. In some cases the handicrafts traditionally found in towns and villages simply disappeared. In other instances they were transformed into larger units. Thus the cabinetmaker's shop could become a furniture factory, a blacksmith shop could become an engine works or a stove manufacture.²² By 1840 the process of transformation from craft production to factory was far from complete, but it was well under way. Where transportation was best, household and craft manufactures were least. In most New York cities and villages, however, small shops and mills continued to exist although larger factories were becoming more common. A random sampling of information on New York towns from an 1842 gazetteer gives a good indication of this. The town of Factoryville on the north shore of Staten Island had a population of 600; there were 100 houses, 1 Episcopal chapel, 4 taverns, 5 stores, 1 grist mill, and the New York Dyeing and Printing Company, "one of the largest works of the kind in the Union; it is owned by a chartered company, with a capital of \$200,000-giving employment to about 300 workers."²³



Pleasant Valley in Dutchess County with a population of 650 boasted 100 houses, 3 churches, 2 public houses, 5 stores, 1 saw mill, and a cotton factory containing 3,000 spindles and 72 power looms. In western New York, Batavia in Genesee County, a town of 2,000 inhabitants, was listed as having 5 churches, a female seminary "in a flourishing condition," 2 banks, 7 hotels and taverns, 30 stores, shops and groceries, 1 flour mill, 2 furnaces, 1 tannery, 3 printing offices, "besides several other kinds of mechanics' shops." The town of Rome in central New York, having 2,500 inhabitants, contained a flour mill, a saw mill, a blast furnace, and a brewery, plus a number of smaller craft shops.²⁴

According to the United States Census of 1840 New York State annually produced manufactured goods valued at \$96 million. In that year the total invested in manufactures in the state (exclusive of iron works which were classified with mines) was over \$55.25 million. Both in annual production and in capital investment in manufacturing New York led every other state. New York City alone produced goods valued at nearly \$23.4 million, an increase of 242 percent from the rather unreliable figures given in the state census of 1835. The leading manufacturing enterprises in 1840 were cotton factories, woolen mills, iron works, distilleries, and tanneries. Within New York City 67 percent of those gainfully employed were engaged in some sort of manufacture;

the figure for the remainder of the state was 25 percent. Clearly the factory system was well on its way toward dominating New York's economy.²⁵

II

Between the panics of 1837 and 1857 were two decades of phenomenal economic growth in New York and the nation. It was during this period that factories began returning sufficient profits to supply a good share of the necessary capital for future development and expansion. The growth of major industries was maintained by plowing back part of these profits. In this way the Industrial Revolution became self-sustaining, no longer dependent on government as the chief supplier of capital. Professor Walter W. Rostow has called this the "take-off" point; the point at which the United States passed from an under-developed nation and began a "sustained drive to maturity."²⁶ The United States, particularly in the Middle Atlantic and New England states, built up what a recent economist has termed the "social overhead capital" necessary for carrying through the Industrial Revolution.²⁷ Americans were propelled in these years toward the modern world in which the wealth of the factory far overshadowed the riches of the soil. Already by 1850 the value of manufactured goods surpassed that of agricultural products.²⁸

In value of output, number of workers engaged in manufacturing, and diversity of industrial production New

York led every other state in the three decades preceding the Civil War. According to the 1850 Census, New York possessed one-seventh of the true valuation of property in the whole country; the state's manufactured products equaled 23 percent of all goods produced in America.²⁹

The pre-eminence of New York owed much to the state's natural and man-made advantages. It had the finest harbor on the Atlantic Coast as well as the most central and economical route to the West along the gateway of the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys. Long the commercial leader of the nation, as well as the financial center, New York had more investment capital available than any other state. Since New York City was the port of entry for the great majority of immigrants the state's industries had a more than adequate supply of cheap labor. In addition, the Empire State had an ample food supply, many natural resources, and favorable corporation laws.³⁰

After 1840, railroads came to play an extremely significant role in New York's economic development. Far more than turnpikes or canals, railroads broke down local self-sufficiency, encouraging commercial farming and manufacturing. The Mohawk and Hudson Railroad was incorporated in 1826 with the "Good Patroon" Stephen Van Rensselaer as the first President. Five years later the engine "DeWitt Clinton" was pulling the first trains on a 16 mile stretch from Albany to Schnectady. At the time this was the second

operational railroad in the country. Its chief function was to carry passengers, avoiding a slow passage along that section of the Erie Canal caused by several locks. Railroads were viewed chiefly as supplements to the waterways of the state.³¹ By 1840, however, railroads had passed their experimental stage; their advantages in speed, dependability and year-round service were now recognized. In 1841 New York had over 1,000 miles of tracks, more than one-fourth of the total track mileage in the country.³² With the completion of the Attica to Buffalo line on November 24, 1842, it was possible to travel across the state from Albany to Buffalo by train. However, with eight separate rail companies it was scarcely direct service.³³

In the forties railroads began to gain a larger percentage of the freight carried in the state. But until 1851 the New York legislature banned freight shipments on rail lines bordering the canal routes except in winter. After that date, when this ban was lifted, railroads attracted practically all the freight with the exception of bulky raw materials such as lumber and grain. In 1853, Erastus Corning, a wealthy Albany merchant, combined the various short lines across the state and their branches into the New York Central Company. This provided direct rail service from Albany to Buffalo and had connections with lines from Boston and New York in the east and with lines running along the south shore of Lake Erie reaching as far as Chicago



and St. Louis to the west.³⁴

Two years before the New York Central had consolidated the lines running parallel to Clinton's canal, the Erie Railroad, which a group of New York merchants had chartered in 1832, completed its connections from east to west. With Daniel Webster riding, at least part of the way, in a rocking chair fastened to the top of a flat car and with President Millard Filmore among the celebrities, the first Erie train made its way from Piermont on the Hudson to Dunkirk on Lake Erie in May 1851. This line, running through New York's Southern Tier, although beset by financial and engineering difficulties, did provide the state with another important direct route between New York City and the West.³⁵

By the Civil War the United States had over 30,000 miles of railroad, over 3,000 of which crisscrossed New York State. It was then possible to travel from New York to Chicago to St. Louis or Memphis and back to New York. In the late fifties New York railroads were hauling nearly 3.5 million tons of freight yearly.³⁶ Freight rates, although slightly higher than water transportation, had been reduced to less than 2¢ per ton mile.³⁷ More than any other innovation in the nation's history the railroad gave this country a national economy, completing the demise of self-sufficient farming and household manufacturing.

In 1860 the writer of a New York gazetteer, J. H. French, commented on the impact of the railroad on industrial



production; "the lines of internal communication through the State," he wrote, "have greatly facilitated the spread of manufactures; and now flourishing establishments are found in nearly every part of the State."³⁸ The incomplete state census of 1855 listed over 24,000 manufacturing establishments, producing goods valued at over \$317 million annually. Many of these were still small local mills; for example, nearly 5,000 of the concerns listed were saw mills many of which were quite modest.³⁹ But the railroads' creation of an interdependent national economy had given rise to larger firms and greater regional specialization. New York's manufacturing remained highly diversified; however, certain localities became noted for particular products. The Albany-Troy region became the nation's leading center for the production of iron goods such as stoves, nails, horse-shoes, railroad spikes, bells, railroad cars, and coaches and carriages. Iron ore was mined in the southern highlands, chiefly in Orange County, and in the Adirondack and Lake Champlain area of New York, but by the forties a great deal of iron ore was being brought in from out-of-state via the Erie Canal. In 1850 the yearly net value of New York State's metal products, including machinery, was nearly \$28 million.⁴⁰

To the north of the Albany-Troy complex was centered the state's valuable lumber industry. Northern river towns on the fringe of the Adirondack forests such as Glens Falls, Watertown, Ticonderoga, Mechanicville, and

Schuylerville became great lumber and paper producing centers. Lumbering was also extensive in the western part of the state. New York led all other states up through the Civil War period in the manufacture of wood articles such as furniture, cabinets, and kitchen utensils. The total net value of New York's wood products was approximately \$14.5 million in 1850.⁴¹

Another extensive industry was the manufacture of leather and leather goods. With the possible exception of textile manufacturing, the leather industry employed more persons than any other in the state. Tanneries were found throughout New York, but particularly in the Catskill Mountain region where vast hemlock forests were used in the tanning process. New York City was the center for the manufacture of finished leather products. Goods produced ranged from leather under-garments--"much more conductive to health as well as more pleasant to wear than flannel"--to saddles, shoes, shirts, and gloves. Other important leather manufacturing centers were Gloversville, Johnstown, Albany, and Newburgh. The 1850 valuation for leather and leather products was over \$11.6 million.⁴²

In New York's western cities manufacturing remained more diversified. In 1860 gazetteer for example listed the following manufacturing establishments in the City of Rochester; 24 flour mills, 41 flour barrel factories, 8 forges, 1 safe factory, 2 cotton factories, 17 breweries, 15 boat yards,

8 coach and carriage makers, 5 boot and shoe factories, 8 cabinet shops, 2 chair factories, 1 carpet factory, and 1 paper mill as well as several saw mills, soap makers, and tanneries.⁴³ This same source relates that Buffalo in 1847 had over 400 manufactures. Prominent were flour mills, ship builders, leather makers, machine shops, stove factories, distilleries, and piano makers.⁴⁴

Yet here too specialization was apparent. Both Rochester and Buffalo were the nation's flour grinding centers until surpassed by cities further to the West in the mid-fifties. In the late thirties Rochester's 21 flour mills, utilizing the power of the Genesee River, were turning out nearly 500,000 barrels of flour annually. By the 1850's Rochester's mills produced over 800,000 barrels annually, a production figure that was nearly equaled by Buffalo and was now surpassed by Oswego.⁴⁵

The chief manufacturing center of the state was, of course, the mushrooming metropolis, New York City. The census of 1860 revealed that 20 percent of the state's manufacturing establishments were located within the city limits, and that these produced 40 percent of the total product.⁴⁶ In Gotham industrialists turned out everything from ships to socks. Dilapidated sweatshops along Chatham Street between the Battery and City Hall Park were the center of New York's numerous ready-made clothing shops. After the perfection of the sewing machine by Elias Howe in 1846, this industry

flourished, turning out much of the clothing for the country.⁴⁷ Along the East and North Rivers bordering on Lower Manhattan were located the various ship building and marine supply making establishments. It was here that many of America's ante-bellum sailing ships were constructed.⁴⁸ Other important City industries included such things as furniture making, sugar refining, distilling, shoe making, textile production, the making of precision implements and musical instruments.⁴⁹

Thomas Cochran recently wrote that "the nation's business in 1855 was nearly as intersectional as in 1870. . . . By the late 1850's the United States was a rapidly maturing industrial state with its major cities connected by rail, its major industries selling in a national market, and blessed or cursed with financiers, security flotations, stock markets, and all the other appurtenances of industrial capitalism."⁵⁰ For New York State this was unquestionably the case. By the mid-century period the factory system had superseded handicraft and domestic production. New York had passed through the most fundamental stages of the Industrial Revolution.

III

The changes wrought by the economic transformation which took place between 1830 and 1860 had a profound effect on New York society. Tocqueville had speculated in the early thirties on what long range effects factory production



might have on American society. He saw a trend toward greater specialization of labor. "What," he asked, "can be expected of a man who has spent twenty years of his life in making heads for pins?" His answer was that the more labor was subdivided the weaker the individual laborer would become. On the other hand, he predicted that as manufacturing expanded wealthy capitalists would emerge who must take a broad view of the entire business and not just an aspect. Thus, the difference between owners and workers would increase with factory production. "Each of them fills the station which is made for him, and out of which he does not get: the one is continually, closely, and necessarily dependent upon the other, and seems as born to obey as the other is to command. What is this but aristocracy?"⁵¹

Native Americans witnessing the early changes caused by industrialization expressed similar fears. The labor paper the Mechanics' Free Press (Philadelphia), August 9, 1828, was alarmed by the thought that the United States "shall soon add one more to the catalogue of nations, whom aristocracy has blasted, and whom inequality of wealth, has precipitated from a comparatively prosperous situation to the lowest grade of degradation and misery."⁵² A few years later Ralph Waldo Emerson confessed in his Journal the fear that the increasing power of the rising industrialists would "upset the balance of man, and establish a new, universal monarchy more tyrannical than Babylon or Rome."⁵³



By the mid-forties it seemed to many Americans that these earlier forebodings had become realities. The most obvious aspect of the Industrial Revolution was the physical change in production methods--the use of water power and steam driven machines, and the new factory system. But an equally important aspect of this revolution was what one historian has termed the less dramatic "social revolution in which sovereignty in economic affairs passed from the community as a whole into the keeping of a special class."⁵⁴ Two new classes emerged--capitalists and workers--and, just as Tocqueville had foreseen, the gap between these classes was accentuated. No longer in the factories did a master-owner work by the side of his journeymen and apprentices.

In the major manufacturing enterprises ownership was widely removed from the workers. This was particularly true of corporations, a form of business organization which multiplied in the two decades before the Civil War. Corporations easily withstood the strong sentiment against them in the Jacksonian period. Laws of general incorporation were adopted in most states by the forties which helped separate the corporation from politics and special privilege. In 1846 New York State revised its corporation law of 1811 to allow any company to incorporate regardless of capital. This law also provided for limited liability to stockholders.⁵⁵ The advantages of conducting business under this method of organization were many. The corporation with transferable

shares was the best method of raising large capital, and it had longevity, something which proprietorship and partnerships lacked. Because of these features many of New York's major manufactures were incorporated.⁵⁶

The incorporated factory was an impersonal entity in which the actual owners seldom had a direct role in supervising the labor force. In the forties and fifties corporation directors were learning how to control great fortunes and use them to gain personal profits with little risk involved and with no concern about laboring conditions. Railroad corporations led the way in this development. It was in this period that financiers such as Daniel Drew, Edward Crane, Robert Schuyler, and Cornelius Vanderbilt started their railroad empires. Although the railroad multimillionaires were a post-war phenomenon, the way was certainly cleared for these rail kings. Already in the fifties railroads like the Erie were the playthings of Wall Street.⁵⁷

Statistically the industrial production of the seventies and eighties makes that of the forties and fifties seem small scale; but this is misleading. The rate of industrial growth in terms of the value added by manufactures was greater in the two decades from 1839 to 1859 than during any other twenty year period of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ But quite apart from economic statistics is the fact that the generation of the forties and fifties was the first to experience fully the effects of the Industrial Revolution.

This experience must have been a greater shock than anything felt by Americans of the late nineteenth century since it marked such a radical departure from the agrarian past. Virtually all of the major industrial problems associated with the Gilded Age--from urban slums to a grossly unequal division of wealth--were experienced first by Americans of the generation immediately preceding the Civil War.⁵⁹

Industry produced more wealth than had hitherto existed in America, while at the same time the distribution of wealth became more and more ill-balanced. Mrs. Lydia Child, an American writer of juvenile fiction, described the visibility of New York City's growing inequality of fortunes in the mid-forties. "A few moments' walk from salons superbly furnished in the style of Louis XIV, brings us to Loafers' Hall, a dreary desolate apartment where shivering urchins pay a cent apiece, for the privilege of keeping out of the watchmen's hands, by sleeping on boards ranged in tiers."⁶⁰ In the early sixties a Scottish artisan living in New York wrote:

The independent, equal, and familiar relation which masters and men were wont to bear to each other is daily assuming a more exclusive character; the moneyed men will not be content with the mere value in labour for their cash; they must have that respect, or outward show of it which their wealth demands. . . . Men value money for two things: in the first place, it ministers to their creature comforts, and in the second, it gives them power, both socially and morally.⁶¹

In 1820 there were only 102 men in New York City whose personal property assessment was over \$20,000. Twenty-



five years later when Moses Yale Beach, publisher of the New York Sun, issued his fifth edition of Wealth and Biography, brief sketches of New Yorkers worth over \$100,000, there were 950 persons in this category, including twenty-one "millionaires"--a term that first came into vogue in the early forties.⁶² Another indication of the great rise in wealth was the increase in property value. Real estate value in New York State was assessed at \$504 million in 1842; this was a 100 percent increase over the value in 1828.⁶³

Not all this wealth, of course, was a direct result of industrialization. Along with the pre-eminent position of New York as a manufacturing center, the state retained its commercial leadership. In 1851 New York's commerce accounted for 41 percent of the nation's export trade and 61 percent of the import trade. Many of the state's richest men were in the traditional commercial professions of shipping, auctioneering, importing or exporting, and banking.⁶⁴

Two of the country's richest men by the late forties were Alexander T. Stewart and Horace B. Claflin--rival dry goods merchants in New York City. Stewart, a Scotch Irish immigrant, had opened a small shop on Broadway in the mid-twenties. By the late thirties he was doing the largest retail and wholesale drygoods business in the country. His marble store on Broadway between Reade and Chambers Street--Broadway's first marble building known as Stewart's

"marble palace"--was America's first modern department store. Stewart was one of the earliest businessmen to realize the value of selling great quantities of goods at a small profit, making money through the volume of sales. In this manner he made millions and by the 1850's was the second richest man in America.⁶⁵

Claflin, his chief competitor, was a New Englander who did not enter the New York dry goods business until 1843, after a successful merchandising career in Massachusetts. Like Stewart, he soon built up a nationwide wholesale business as well as a large retail trade through his Broadway store. By the time of the Civil War his wealth was conservatively estimated at \$10 million.⁶⁶

Others made great fortunes from urban real estate. If one was fortunate or farsighted enough to own land in or around an expanding city it was almost a mathematical certainty that this land would increase in value. City real estate was not subject to the extreme fluctuations which affected rural landholdings. This was particularly true of those owning land in New York City. When Henry Brevoort died at the age of 94 in 1848, his estate was valued at about \$1 million. Most of this wealth came from the ownership of eleven acres of land in the heart of the city. Formerly a dairy and vegetable farm to the north of the city in Greenwich Village, the growth of New York placed the Brevoort farm running from 8th Street and 4th Avenue to 13th Street

and 6th Avenue nearly in the city's center.⁶⁷ Other New York City families such as the Schermerhorns, Rhinelanders, Goelets, and Lorillards owed their wealth chiefly to landholdings in Manhattan. Hone in his diary gives an indication of how valuable New York real estate could be. In 1832 a lot at the corner of Broadway and Park Place 25 feet by 120 feet sold for \$37,000. In the prosperous year of 1835 one 30 foot by 75 foot lot on William Street between Pine and Wall sold for \$51,000. That same year following the disastrous fire twenty burned downtown lots sold at auction for \$765,100. Hone sold his own house at 235 Broadway for \$60,000 in 1836.⁶⁸

New York's greatest landlord and the country's richest man was John Jacob Astor. While compiling his fortune in the early nineteenth century, Astor, visualizing the phenomenal growth of New York, invested an average of \$35,000 annually in city real estate between 1800 and 1819. He bought such property as the Medeef Eden farm which ran from the future site of 42nd Street to 46th and from Broadway to the Hudson. By the time of his death in 1848 the Astor landholdings were worth over \$20 million.⁶⁹

Conventionally historians in speaking of New York society of the pre-Civil War generation have made a distinction between mercantile and landholding families on the one hand and rising capitalist-industrialists on the other, implying that these groups--representing an "old" and a "new"



aristocracy--were somehow diametrically opposed to one another.⁷⁰ This division is highly misleading. For one thing there was no such clear-cut split between types of wealth. Virtually every New Yorker of fortune had money tied up in more than one enterprise and most were quick to support new enterprises in the fields of industry and transportation. For example, Robert Schuyler, scion of the Hudson Valley gentry, was one of the leading pre-Civil War railroad magnates and President of the New York and New Haven Railroad.⁷¹

William Aspinwall, a wealthy and highly respected merchant, who, together with William Howland, headed New York's largest importing and exporting firm, retired from this field in 1851 to devote his full time to railroad development. He and his associates financed the building of the lucrative trans-Panama railroad which provided the fastest transportation to California. By 1859 the railroad alone netted a profit of over \$6 million and Aspinwall became one of New York's richest citizens.⁷² Another well-to-do importer, John Jay Phelps, also became a prominent railway promoter.⁷³

Examples of this sort could be multiplied endlessly, but the point is that there was not such a sharp division between an "old" and a "new" wealth. The common meeting ground of all New York men of fortune was the Stock Exchange. Here could be found wealthy industrialists such as Peter Cooper and William Colgate talking familiarly

with an Astor or a Goelet on the latest price of Hudson River Railway. By the forties and fifties the stock market on Wall Street was a well organized and highly developed institution, largely serving the rich. Investors whether merchants, landholders, or industrialists were chiefly concerned with making a profit. In this period the instrument of profit making became the corporation which skilled financiers learned to control and to manipulate on the stock market for private gain.⁷⁴

Stock manipulation was common, and certainly no bar to respectability. "The greatest gambling in the Republic," wrote a New Yorker, "is going on, and the deepest dishonesty is concealed by the garb of commercial honor. No one asks nor expects favors. All stratagems are deemed fair in Wall Street."⁷⁵ "Bulls" would purchase shares at a low price and then spread rumors of government grants or large dividends to raise the price. "Bears" gossiped to send prices tumbling and then bought low. Out of all this great profits were made by insiders while the small investor was fleeced.

Other frauds included the selling of unauthorized or forged stocks. Robert Schuyler in his position as President of the New York and New Haven Railroad in 1854 sold 20,000 hypothecated shares in his own company for a personal profit of over \$2 million. As the diarist George Templeton Strong noted, this swindle was committed "by no nameless money-making speculator, but by one of our 'first' people

in descent and social position and supposed wealth. . . ." Schuyler fled with the money and was never brought to justice. That same year Alexander Kyle of the Harlem Railroad sold \$300,000 worth of forged stock for his own profit. Two years later, Charles B. Huntington, a Wall Street broker and well-known figure in New York society, was apprehended after forging some \$300,000 worth of stock certificates. Though occasionally criminal activity of this sort was discovered and condemned, many dishonest stock market manipulations were dismissed or even praised because of their success.⁷⁶

Heirs of patroons and the first Grace Church pew purchasers and newer Episcopalians alike were capable of formulating and following together a new Wall Street ethic. G. G. Foster, a prolific New York author, described the financial magnate of the 1850's as follows:

The engines and instruments by which this man works are numerous and characteristic. Sometimes he forestalls the market of a certain kind of product and then when his carefully concealed operations are completed, gradually expands the price in accordance with the increasing demand, until he thus gathers his thousands from the absolute necessities of the community. Sometimes he organizes a company to kindly supply the people with money, or to dig coal, or copper, or zinc, or lead, from fabulous mines, drawn carefully out on paper maps, and situated in some inaccessible Sahara amid the wild regions of New Jersey. Then he sells the stock out upon a fictitious valuation got up by incessant puffs in the leading commercial papers, and so makes a fortune, and the scheme explodes. Sometimes he discovers that the interests and honor of the nation require a railroad from Frogtown to Tadpolopolis, and a similar operation lines his pocket at the cost of a few



hundred green victims; or perhaps the commercial prosperity of the Empire State demands that a line of steamships should be established to break down all opposition and prove that some things can be done as well as others. Straightway the newspaper pumps are put in operation, and the books of subscription opened, and flaming appeals made to the patriotism of Congress for a small appropriation of a million or two, just by way of experiment, and to sustain the honor of the country. Of course the stock is subscribed and paid for by the victims, while the appropriation goes into the pockets of the shrewd capitalist, and he becomes more magnificent, more haughty and insolent than ever. Arrived at the station of millionaire . . . he has forgotten himself and all the incidents that might embarrass or humiliate him in his present position.⁷⁷

The Industrial Revolution in conjunction with gains in commercial wealth and urban land values created a powerful and prestigious class of financial magnates. Although all barriers between the so-called "old" family rich and "new" were not entirely broken down so far as the drawing room was concerned, it was no longer meaningful to speak of these precise divisions by the 1850's. The old Knickerbocker elite of the thirties who retained both wealth and position in the forties and fifties generally did so by amalgamating with the new moneyed class. Together they acquired wealth, social recognition, and a good deal of control over the nation's manufacturing, transportation, and commercial facilities.

Before analyzing more closely this New York aristocracy it remains to examine the position of the growing class of industrial workers in New York State. Far more than any other group, labor suffered from the changes wrought by industrialization.



FOOTNOTES

¹Quoted in Thomas C. Cochran and William Miller, The Age of Enterprise (New York, 1942), p. 6.

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³Quoted in Richard Hofstadter, William Miller, and Daniel Aaron, The United States (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1957), p. 182.

⁴August Beer Gold, "A History of Manufacturing in New York City, 1825-1840" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Columbia University, 1932), pp. 17-18.

⁵Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, V, 350-51.

⁶Victor S. Clark, History of Manufactures in the United States: 1607-1860 (Washington, D. C., 1916), pp. 274-308; Gold, "A History of Manufacturing in New York City," pp. 18-21; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, V, 352-54; Ross M. Robertson, History of the American Economy (New York, 1964), p. 242.

⁷Quoted in Nathan Miller, The Enterprise of a Free People (Ithaca, N. Y., 1962), pp. 12-13.



⁸Ibid., pp. 12-14; Don C. Sowers, The Financial History of New York State from 1789-1912 (New York, 1914), pp. 263-65.

⁹For example the New York Manufacturing Company was capitalized at \$1,200,000, Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, V, 354-55; Miller, Enterprise of a Free People, p. 14; Donald L. Kemmerer and C. Clyde Jones, American Economic History (New York, 1959), p. 178.

¹⁰Clark, History of Manufactures, pp. 347-48; Carter Goodrich, Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads, 1800-1890 (New York, 1960), pp. 279-80; Noble E. Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York (2 vols., Albany, 1906), II, 808-907.

¹¹James Hardie, The Description of the City of New York (New York, 1827), p. 329.

¹²Calvin Colton, Manual For Emigrants to America (London, 1832), p. 61.

¹³Cochran and Miller, The Age of Enterprise, p. 13.

¹⁴Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols., New York, 1928-44), IX, 192.

¹⁵Walter Hugins, Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class (Stanford, 1960), pp. 79-80.

¹⁶New York: A Guide to the Empire State (New York, 1940), pp. 94-95; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 194-96.

¹⁷Albert S. Bolles, Industrial History of the United States (Norwich, Conn., 1879), pp. 412-413; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 196; New York: A Guide to the Empire State, p. 95.

¹⁸Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 196-98.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Rolla Milton Tryon, Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640-1860 (Chicago, 1917), pp. 303-307.

²¹Ibid., pp. 315-17, 370-76; Arthur Harrison Cole, The American Wool Manufacture (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), p. 280; George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York, 1951), pp. 211-14.

²²Clark, History of Manufactures, p. 465.

²³J. Disturnell, A Gazetteer of the State of New York (Albany, 1842), p. 161.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 327, 74, 347.

²⁵Adna F. Weber, The Growth of Industry in New York (Albany, 1904), p. 25; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 193; Disturnell, Gazetteer, pp. 474-75. The number of manufacturing firms in New York's leading enterprises in 1840 was as follows: 111 cotton factories, 234 woolen mills, 293 iron works, 337 distilleries, and 412 tanneries.

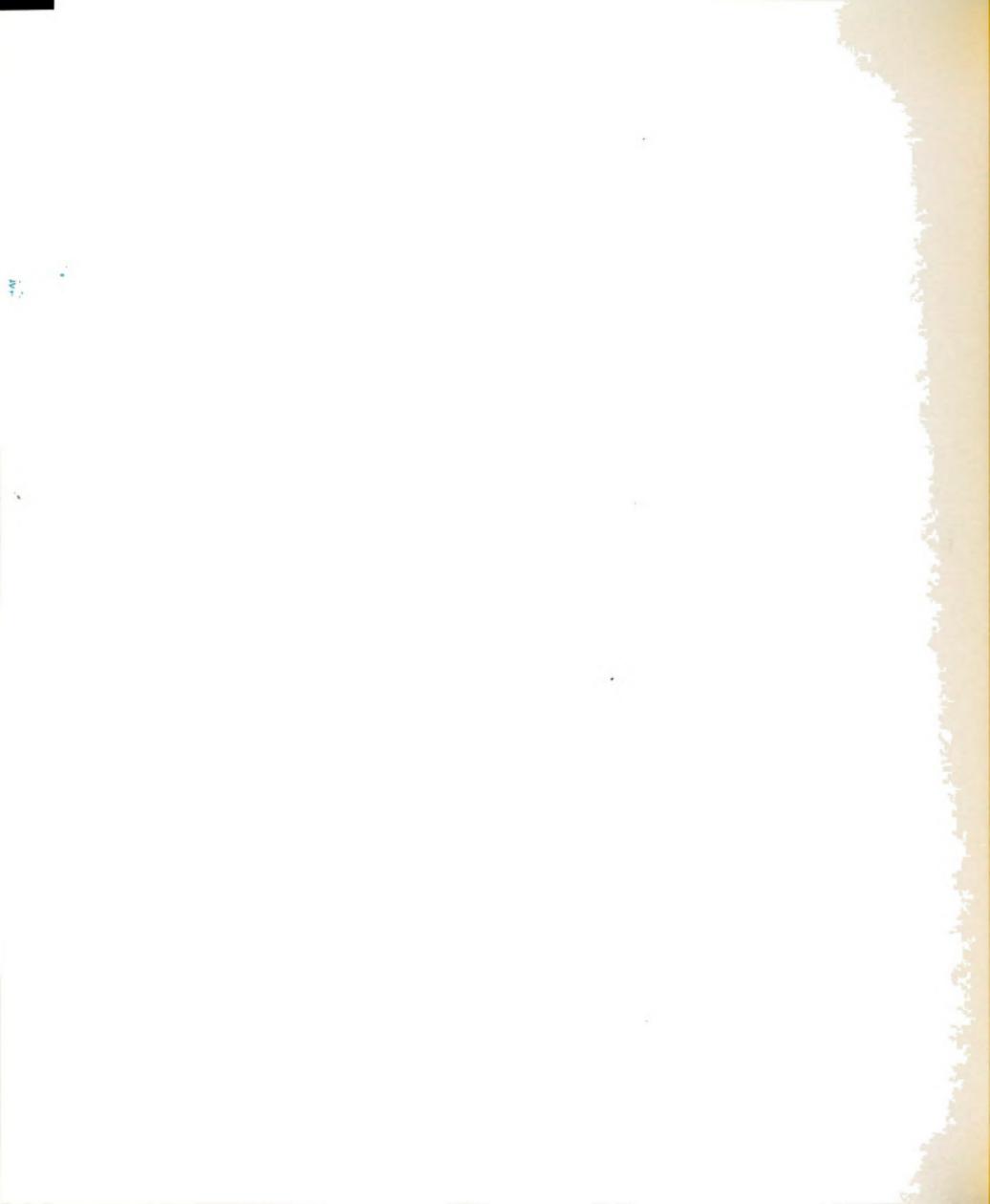
²⁶Walter W. Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth (Cambridge, Eng., 1961), pp. 7-10, 36-58, 95; Rostow sees the 1840's as the start of this "take-off" period and calls it complete by 1860. See also: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Ideas and Economic Development" in Schlesinger and Morton White, eds., Paths of American Thought (Boston, 1963), pp. 113-18.

²⁷Peter d'A. Jones, America's Wealth (New York, 1963), pp. 60-83; see also: Goodrich, Government Promotion, pp. 265-97.

²⁸In 1850 the yearly value of manufactured goods was listed as \$1,055,500,000; agricultural products that year were valued at \$900,000,000. Ten years later industrial output had nearly doubled in value, reaching \$1,885,861,000. However, agricultural output had regained the lead in market value of product (for the last time), reaching an estimated value of \$1,910,000,000. See: T. Harry Williams, Richard N. Current, and Frank Freidel, A History of the United States (2 vols., New York, 1964), I, 452.

²⁹New York: A Guide to the Empire State, pp. 69, 97; David M. Ellis, et al., Short History of New York State (Ithaca, N. Y., 1957), p. 264.

³⁰Weber, The Growth of Industry in New York, pp. 10-16.



³¹Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 127-140; J. H. French, Gazetteer of the State of New York (Syracuse, 1860), pp. 66-69.

³²Disturnell, Gazetteer, p. 48; U. S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945 (Washington, D. C., 1949), p. 200.

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³⁶French, Gazetteer, pp. 70-79.

³⁷Williams, Current, and Freidel, A History of the United States, I, 469.

³⁸Gazetteer, pp. 109-10.

³⁹Ibid.; Ellis, et al., Short History of New York State, p. 265.

⁴⁰New York: A Guide to the Empire State, p. 95; Bolles, Industrial History of the United States, pp. 277-80, 556; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 205-10; Weber, The Growth of Industry in New York, pp. 34-35.

⁴¹Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 218-20; New York: A Guide of the Empire State, p. 96; Weber, The Growth of Industry in New York, pp. 34-35.

⁴²Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 215-18; Bolles, Industrial History of the United States, pp. 451-54; New York: A Guide to the Empire State, pp. 95-96; Weber, The Growth of Industry in New York, pp. 34-35.

⁴³French, Gazetteer, p. 402.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 286.

⁴⁵Blake McKelvey, Rochester the Water-Power City, 1812-1854 (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), p. 209; Blake McKelvey, Rochester the Flower City, 1855-1890 (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), pp. 13-14; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 232-33; French, Gazetteer, p. 402.

⁴⁶Cited in Clark, History of Manufactures, p. 465.

⁴⁷Bolles, Industrial History of the United States, pp. 399-400; New York: A Guide to the Empire State, p. 96.

⁴⁸Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 220-31; Jones, America's Wealth, pp. 41-43; Clark, History of Manufactures, p. 470.



⁴⁹Gold, "History of Manufacturing in New York City."

⁵⁰Thomas C. Cochran, "Did the Civil War Retard Industrialization?" in The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVIII (Sept. 1961), 209.

⁵¹Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1961 ed.), II, 190-94.

⁵²Quoted in Commons, ed., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society, V. 125.

⁵³Quoted in Wecter, The Saga of American Society, p. 103.

⁵⁴Ware, The Industrial Worker, p. xi.

⁵⁵French, Gazetteer, p. 80; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 349-50.

⁵⁶Proprietorships and partnerships continued to be the leading form of business organization in New York State down to the Civil War in terms of numbers, but not in terms of wealth. See: Jones, American Wealth, pp. 98-101; Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 350.

⁵⁷Cochran and Miller, The Age of Enterprise, pp. 67-70; Benson, Merchants, Farmers and Railroads, pp. 58, 129-31, 136-37.

⁵⁸Cockran, "Did the Civil War Retard Industrialization?" p. 199; Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945 (Washington, 1949), pp. 176-87.

⁵⁹An excellent brief discussion of the social impact of industrialism is found in: Gilman Ostrander, The Rights of Man in America, 1606-1861 (Columbia, Mo., 1960), pp. 296-302.

⁶⁰Letters From New York, Second Series (New York, 1845), pp. 279-80.

⁶¹James D. Burn, Three Years Among the Working-Classes in the United States During the War (London, 1865), p. 20.

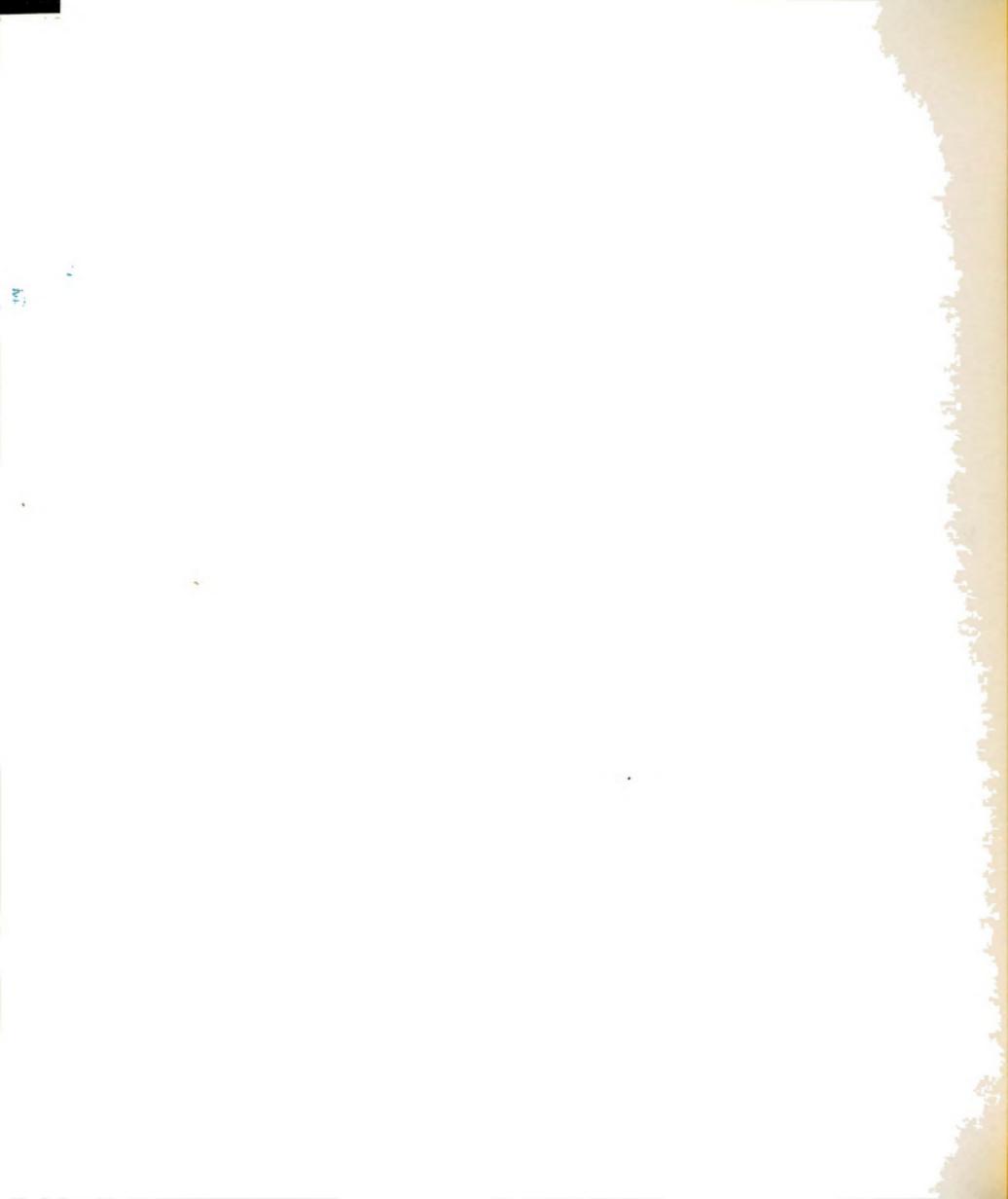
⁶²Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 351; Beach's 5th edition of Wealth and Biography is reprinted in The New York Herald, January 11, 1845; see also: William Miller, "The Realm of Wealth," pp. 137-38 in John Higham, ed., The Reconstruction of American History (New York, 1962).

⁶³Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 351.

⁶⁴Ibid., VI, 343-46.

⁶⁵Johnson and Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography, XVIII, 3-5; Matthew H. Smith, Sunshine and Shadow in New York (Hartford, 1868), pp. 52-62; Junius H. Browne, The Great Metropolis, A Mirror of New York (Hartford, 1869), pp. 289-94.

⁶⁶Johnson and Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography, IV, 110; Browne, The Great Metropolis, pp. 667-68.



⁶⁷Allan Nevins, ed., Diary of Philip Hone (New York, 1936), p. 556.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 54, 156, 199, 201.

⁶⁹The Astor fortune is treated caustically but fully in: Gustavus Myers, History of the Great American Fortunes (New York, 1937), pp. 93-138. See also: Dixon Wector, The Saga of American Society (New York, 1937), pp. 113-15.

⁷⁰See: Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 241-42; Robert Ernst, Immigrant Life in New York City (New York, 1949), pp. 15-17.

⁷¹Allan Nevins and Milton H. Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong (3 vols., New York, 1953), II, 178-79.

⁷²Johnson and Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography, I, 396.

⁷³Ibid., XIV, 533.

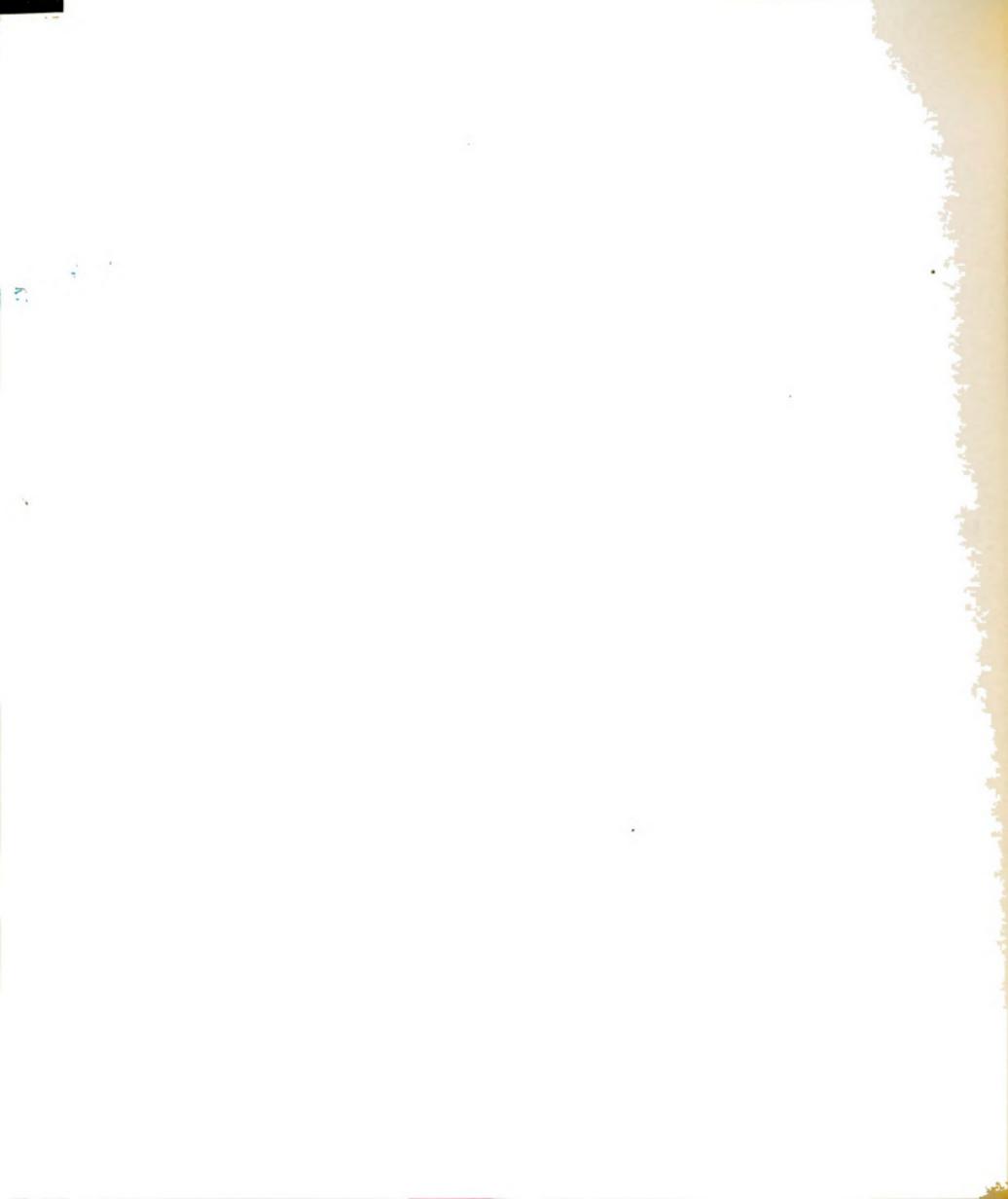
⁷⁴Goodrich, Government Promotion, pp. 292-93; Cochran and Miller, The Age of Enterprise, p. 67; Kemmerer and Jones, American Economic History, pp. 181-86.

⁷⁵Browne, The Great Metropolis, pp. 43-44.

⁷⁶Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, II, 178-79, 313-15; C. H. Haswell, Reminiscences of an Octogenarian, p. 293; Cochran and Miller, The Age of Enterprise, pp. 74-75; Benson, Merchants, Farmers, and Railroads,

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⁷⁷ Fifteen Minutes Around New York (New York, 1853),
pp. 18-19.



CHAPTER 6

THE WIDENING GAP: LABOR IN THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES

Money is the be-all and the end-all in the States. With it you are everything, without it nothing. The working man is as much hemmed in the iron circle of his class as with us [in England]; the petty store-keeper even looks down on him, and "the dignity of labour" is both disbelieved in and ridiculed. I assert that in no country in the world are social distinctions more rigidly enforced.

--London v. New York, 1859

I

The depression of 1837 which lasted through the early forties marked a major turning point in the history of labor in the state of New York. Prior to this working conditions had been harsh, but a substantial labor movement throughout the Jacksonian period had buoyed up the position of the skilled workers. In the thirties the factory system was not yet dominant, and immigration was only beginning to reach substantial numbers. After 1837, however, both skilled and unskilled workers were left without effective organizations at a time when industrial expansion and mass immigration were depressing the entire wage-earning class and widening the gap between classes.

The depression itself nipped the emerging labor movement in the bud and ushered in several years of severe



hardship. In his Recollections of the early effects of the depression in New York City, Horace Greeley wrote that "the winter of 1837-38, though happily mild and open till far into January, was one of prevailing destitution and suffering in our city, from paralysis of business and consequent dearth of employment. The liberality of those who could give was heavily taxed to save from famishing the tens of thousands who, being needy and unable to find employment, first ran into debt so far as they could, and thenceforth must be helped or starve." By January, 1838, one source estimated that 50,000 persons were unemployed in New York City. Another 200,000 it was said were living "in utter and hopeless distress with no means of surviving the winter but those provided by charity."¹

Labor suffered not only from widespread unemployment but also from reduced wages for those with jobs. Work was so scarce that thousands were willing to work for almost nothing. In August, 1837, five hundred had turned up in answer to an advertisement for twenty spade laborers to work for \$4 a month with board.² Obviously under these circumstances striking to maintain wages or jobs was futile. Employers took full advantage of the opportunity to crush the labor movement. One New York newspaper recommended that businessmen "employ no men who do not forever abjure unions." It further advised that "the rules of unions as to hours, pay, and everything else, ought to be thoroughly broken up."³



General economic distress caused a growing class consciousness on the part of New York workers, while at the same time respectable persons feared the possibility of class warfare. Late in 1837 angry Manhattan workers, incensed by high food prices, had attacked a flour warehouse on Washington Street and ransacked it after driving off the mayor and the police.⁴ That following spring a magazine writer observed growing signs of unrest. From everywhere, he wrote, "comes rumor after rumor of riot, insurrection, and tumult."⁵ Hordes of beggars crowded New York streets. The rich held concerts and balls to raise funds for poor relief, but these were insufficient. The problem of conducting large scale public relief was relatively new in America and it was handled haphazardly. Perturbation continued; a New York observer in 1841 saw a growing restlessness of the "noisy and tumultuous masses--shouting for change, reform, and progress."⁶

Poverty and unemployment such as persons experienced during this first major industrial depression were hard for Americans to understand. The traditional notion was that destitution stemmed from individual indolence or ineptitude and that any honest and willing worker could find employment at a decent wage. A few humanitarian individuals such as Horace Greeley could sympathize with the poor mechanic "whose cry was, not for the bread and fuel of charity, but for Work!"⁷ But the majority of Americans were contented to let things take their course in the optimistic belief that improvement

was inevitable.

By 1843 the depression had run its course and business once more picked up. But for the laborer prosperity did not return. "How is it," asked a New York workingman in the early forties, "that a country as rich as ours is yet pinched for the common necessities of life?"⁸ Workers' wage cuts ranged from 30 to 50 percent during the depression years. In the forties increased industrialization in conjunction with large scale immigration worked to keep wages at a low scale.⁹ John Finch, an English Owenite, made the following comparison of wages in Britain and the United States in 1844:

It is much easier to obtain employment, at present, in the United States than in England; but in this respect they are getting into worse and worse condition. The manufacturers, in the East, have introduced all our improvement in machinery, (and the effects are the same as in this country) they are making very large quantities of goods; competition is increasing, prices are very much reduced, and the wages of labour, generally, throughout the States and Canada, have been reduced from thirty to fifty per cent within the last four years, . . . and, if competition continue, no parties can prevent wages from falling as low there as they are in England, and this within a comparatively short period. Wages in America are not much higher, even now, than they are with us.¹⁰

To the skilled artisan industrialization came as a threat. In industry after industry he felt himself challenged by new methods which required little skill or training. By the forties factories had made the skill of cordwainers, coopers, and ironsmiths nearly obsolete. Printers, challenged by revolutionary new presses and steam power, found their

wages, status, and independence declining.¹¹ "Machinery has taken almost entire possession of the manufacture of cloth," complained Thomas Devyr, an associate of George Henry Evans on the Working Man's Advocate; "it is making steady--we might say rapid--advances upon all branches of iron manufacture; the newly invented machine saws, working in curves as well as straight lines, the planing and grooving machines, and the tenon and mortise machine, clearly admonish us that its empire is destined to extend itself over all our manufactures of wood; while some of our handicrafts are already extinct, there is not one of them but has foretasted the overwhelming competition of this occult power."¹²

Among other trades the introduction of machinery and the use of cheaper immigrant labor caused a similar insecurity and drop in wages. The pay of journeymen hatters fell from an average of \$12 a week in 1835 to about \$8 a week in 1845. New York cabinetmakers, facing stiff competition from factories mass producing furniture with the aid of cheap German labor, were compelled to work longer and longer hours to earn as much as \$5 per week.¹³ A group of mechanics seeing the trend in wages asked in 1845: "How much can a mechanic lay up for sickness and old age--and what comforts the mechanic in New York can enjoy from his wages, in comparison with those engaged in some sort of business, are questions which we should like some of the brethren in New York to answer."¹⁴

While wages decreased or at best stayed the same in the 1840's, the cost of living was rising. This was particularly true of New York City, where the growing population made land values soar and rents rise correspondingly. "The high price of living in New-York," wrote a resident of that city, "has borne so heavily upon the poor that it has crowded them into tenement houses, and compelled them to subsist in the most unnatural manner."¹⁵

Americans at the time were quick to blame the thousands of foreigners coming to this country yearly for many of the social ills of the day, especially unemployment and low wages. Yet as a recent historian has stated: "If the economic pattern of the time had involved a fair return for the great contribution of the immigrant, the number of foreign-born paupers would have been negligible."¹⁶

In November of 1853 a writer for the New York Times drew up a budget for a working-class family of four "living moderately." The yearly budget ran as follows:¹⁷

<u>Item</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Groceries	\$273
Rent	100
Clothing, bedding, etc.	132
Furnishings	20
Fuel	18
Lights	10
Taxes, Water, Commutation, etc.	5
Physicians' and druggists' charges	10
Travelling	12
Newspapers, postage, and library fees	10
Church, Charity, etc.	<u>10</u>
Total	\$600

Two years earlier Horace Greeley in the New York Tribune had estimated a similar workingman's budget, and although Greeley allowed less for such things as travelling, newspapers, and library fees, the totals were about the same.¹⁸ Both sources figured the weekly income necessary for a workingman to sustain a family was approximately \$11 per week. But except for the workers in certain skilled trades, notably building, few received weekly wages anywhere near this sum. Factory operatives and common laborers in the early fifties averaged less than \$5 a week. Skilled mechanics and craftsmen earned anywhere from \$1.25 to \$2.00 daily. Women needleworkers, probably the lowest paid employees, seldom earned as much as \$2.00 weekly.¹⁹

These low wages created a situation where thousands of urban working-class families were living on the barest level of subsistence with no ability to save funds for any emergency. "In the city of New York," remarked an humanitarian minister in the late forties, "there are multitudes who earn by their daily labour just enough to maintain themselves and those dependent on them; and if sickness lays its hand on the head of the family, or one of the members, the income ceases altogether, or is inadequate to the increased expense, and aid must be obtained from abroad, or there is instant suffering for want of it."²⁰

Charles Brace, organizer of the Children's Aid Society in 1853, described a New York laboring family at about

that date. The husband worked in an iron foundry, but when Brace visited the family the husband had been ill for several weeks. To survive the mother had sent her ten-year-old child out to beg in the streets. "You know how it is sir with working people," she told Brace. "If a man falls out of work for a day, the family feels it for a week after. We can hardly make the two ends meet when he's well, and the moment he is sick it comes hard upon us. Many's the morning he's gone down to the foundry without his breakfast. . . ."21

Working-class living conditions reflected the low wage scales. In 1845, nearly half a century before Jacob Riis called attention to New York's poverty in How the Other Half Lives, Dr. John H. Griscom, a tireless worker on behalf of the poor, described in language strikingly similar to that of Riis "the system of tenantage to which large numbers of the poor are subject." Dr. Griscom painted a horrid picture of these tenements:

Every corner of the room, of the cupboards, of the entries and stairways, is piled up with dirt. The walls and ceilings, with the plaster broken off in many places, exposing the lath and beams, and leaving openings for the escape from within of the effluvia of vermin, dead and alive, are smeared with the blood of unmentionable insects, and dirt of indescribable colours.²²

The actual date of the first house built expressly for multi-family dwelling in New York City is uncertain. One source speaks of a seven story tenement at 65 Mott Street in use in 1825, but probably this was a converted warehouse.²³

In October, 1833, James P. Allaire, a wealthy engine manufacturer, built a four story apartment house on Water Street which was "the first house constructed proper or exclusively for tenants. . . ." ²⁴ But certainly crowded, unsanitary accommodations were common in converted buildings prior to this. In 1835 a city inspector of health, Gerret Forbes, reported that New York's high death rate owed much to the "filthy state in which a great portion of our population live." "We have," Forbes continued, "serious cause to regret that there are in our city so many mercenary landlords who only contrive in what manner they can to stow the greatest number of human beings in the smallest space." ²⁵

New York City's population growth far outstripped the rate of house construction. Consequently more and more persons were forced to occupy less and less space. Landlords erected cheap apartments or converted the mansions abandoned by the well-to-do in their exodus to more fashionable uptown areas. Tenement houses were generally double buildings with two apartments on each floor in the front and a similar arrangement in the rear reached by an alley. Most rooms were small, dark and poorly ventilated. Tenants seldom had running water and almost never had indoor toilets. Rents were high, anywhere from \$4 to \$10 per month in the late forties for two closet-like rooms. ²⁶

New York's tenement house population grew like a cancerous blight. By the Civil War over half of the city's



population, nearly 500,000 persons, lived in some 18,000 tenements.²⁷ New York became the most densely populated city in the Western world. For example in the early 1860's London's highest rate of population was in East London where it reached as high as 175,816 persons per square mile. In comparison in parts of New York's 4th ward the tenant-house population in 1864 was "packed in at the rate of about 290,000 inhabitants to the square mile." An 1866 report of the Metropolitan Board of Health shows the 11th ward to have averaged 196,510 people per square mile; the 10th ward 185,512, the 17th 153,006, the 14th 155,880, and the 13th 115,224.²⁸

The Sixth Ward, bounded by fashionable Broadway to the west, Chatham Street to the south, the Bowery to the east, and Canal Street to the north, was the most notorious slum in the country. Here was an area of overwhelming poverty, infamous for its concomitant ills of crime, vice, filth and disease. At the center of this ward was the foul Five Points section, formed by the intersection of Orange, Cross, and Anthony Streets. It was here in 1842 that Charles Dickens, protected by two policemen, descended into the "narrow ways, diverging to right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth."²⁹ Here one could find drunks, sickly begging children, bedraggled women and other figures who might have just stepped out of Hogarth's Gin Lane. A New York minister gave the following description of the housing conditions:

Lodging-rooms above ground are numerous in the narrow lanes, and in the dark dangerous alleys that surround the Five Points. Rooms are rented from two to ten dollars a month, into which no human being would put a dog,--attics, dark as midnight at noon-day, without window or door they can shut, without chimney or stove, and crowded with men, women, and little children. Children are born in sorrow, and raised in reeking vice and bestiality, that no heathen degradation can exceed.³⁰

New York landlords put all available space to use in housing the urban poor. The most offensive of all places for residence, according to Griscom's report, were cellars.³¹ By 1850 about 29,000 persons, largely immigrants, lived underground.³² Many of these dwellings were below sea-level and flooding was a major problem. Others were filled with stagnant water, rotting garbage or worse wastes. "In many cases," wrote an observer, "the vaults of privies are situated on the same or a higher level, and the contents frequently ooze through walls into the occupied apartments."³³ Griscom described one cellar at 50 Pike Street that housed two families--ten persons in all--in a room 10 feet by 10 feet. Rev. George Hatt, an inspector for Dr. Griscom, reported a tiny cellar on Washington Street housing thirteen persons, four adults and nine children. "At times the tide came in; it was always damp, and there was a woman sick with Pleurisy."³⁴ Writers invariably picture cellar dwellings as dark, damp, smelly, and small, but because they rented for slightly less than rooms above ground they were rarely vacant.³⁵

Many wealthy New Yorkers viewed the tenement house system as a lucrative investment. Profits often ran as high



as twenty percent in a single year. In 1864 a city sanitary inspector gave the following report on the exploitation of tenants by owners:

The houses are in many instances owned by large capitalists by whom they are farmed out to a class of factors, who make this their especial business. These men pay to the owners of the property a sum which is considered a fair return on the capital invested, and rely for their profits (which are often enormous) on the additional amount which they can exhort from the wretched tenants whose homes frequently become untenable for want of repairs, which the "agent" deems it his interest to withhold. These men contrive to absorb most of the scanty surplus which remains to the tenants after paying for their miserable food, shelter, and raiment. They are, in many instances, proprietors of low groceries, liquor stores, and "policy shops" connected with such premises,--the same individual often being the actual owner of a large number. Many of the wretched population are held by these men in a state of abject dependence and vassalage little short of actual slavery.³⁶

Interestingly the chief owner of slum real estate in the fifties was William B. Astor--"the landlord of New York"--who had a reputation of being stern with agents and of doing nothing to improve the dilapidated condition of the buildings he owned.³⁷

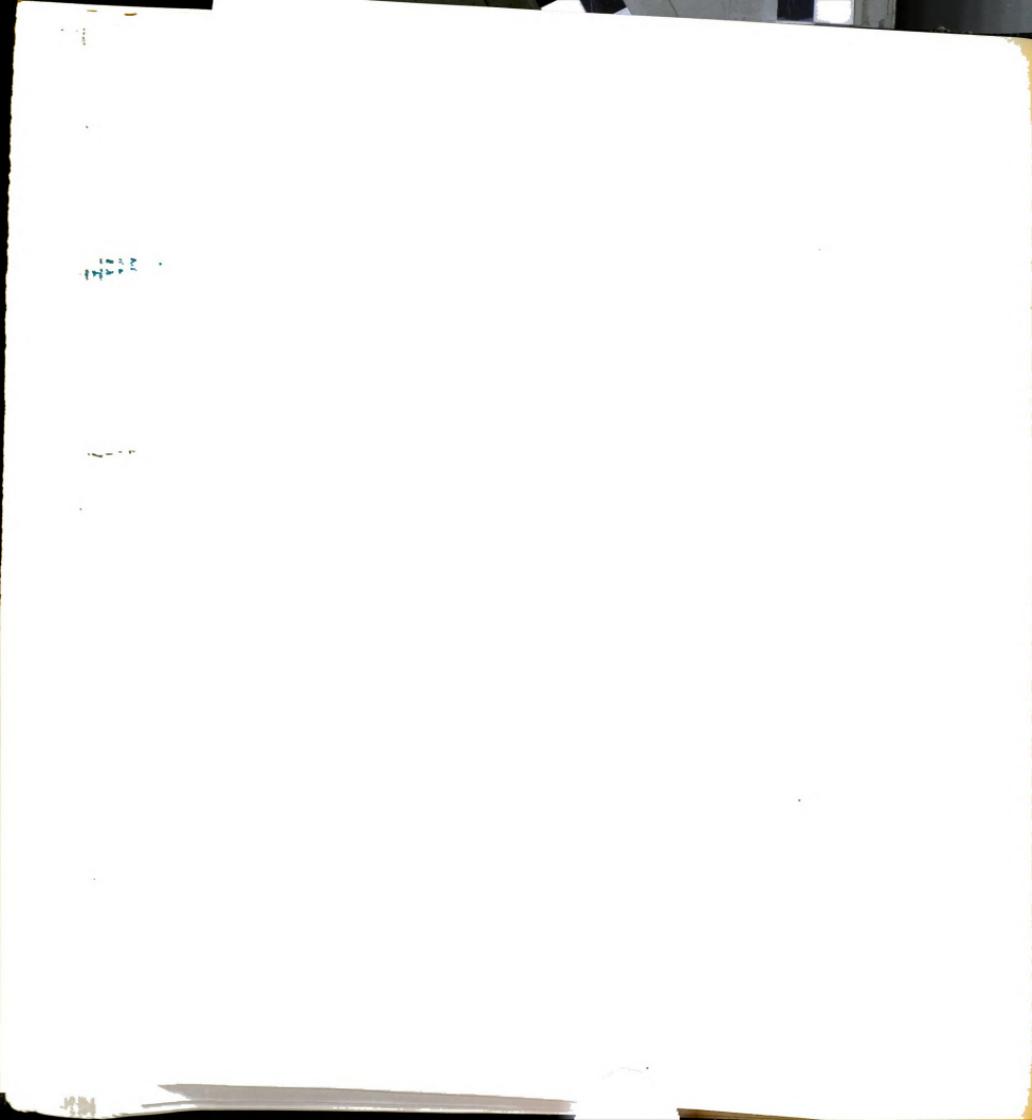
While the rich profitted from this tenantage system it brought untold suffering to working-class persons. Humanitarians such as Dr. Griscom noticed the close connections between slum dwelling and ill health. He found that almost without exception tenements had insufficient ventilation. "The smell," he wrote, "becomes intolerable, and its atmosphere productive to the most malignant diseases."³⁸ Epidemics frequently swept through the heavily populated sections

of the city. "Cholera is in town, and pretty active," noted the diarist George Templeton Strong in June of 1854. "Fifty odd deaths last week. . . . All are thus far confined to the lowest and filthiest classes, whose existence from one day to another in their atmosphere of morbid influences is a triumph of vital organization and illustrates the vigorous tenacity of life (under deadliest conditions) bestowed on the human species."³⁹

In the slums of lower Manhattan dirt and garbage were often piled up several feet above the sidewalk. On Centre Street, for example, a journalist reported "the dirt hills rise to a height of three or four feet; and as no ash-carts have visited this neighborhood for several weeks past, and will not probably for some weeks to come, the prospect of the poor residents is most deplorable."⁴⁰

Living in these overcrowded, ill-ventilated tenements, working when employed at low paying, menial tasks, men soon lost their will to succeed. Physical energy became sapped, the mind dulled. In this state it was a short step to heavy drink or crime, both of which were common in these slum areas.⁴¹

Deplorable living conditions were undoubtedly all the more galling to workingmen since wealth was so visibly present in a city such as New York. Horace Greeley found it ironic that the laborers who build the city's sumptuous mansions more often than not live "in a squalid lodging which



the builders of palaces in the fifteenth century can hardly have dwelt in more wretched. . . ."42 A New York Times article, February 6, 1858, referred to New York as a "Babel of marble palaces and wretched dens of shame and of want. . . ." "Nothing ever moves me more," wrote the Rev. Samuel Prime, "than this almost union of extremes in the city: I have seen a poor blind beggar leaning against the wall of the house where gorgeous magnificence was displaying itself in a luxurious banquet, the wine of which would cost more money than it would take to make that beggar comfortable for a life time."43

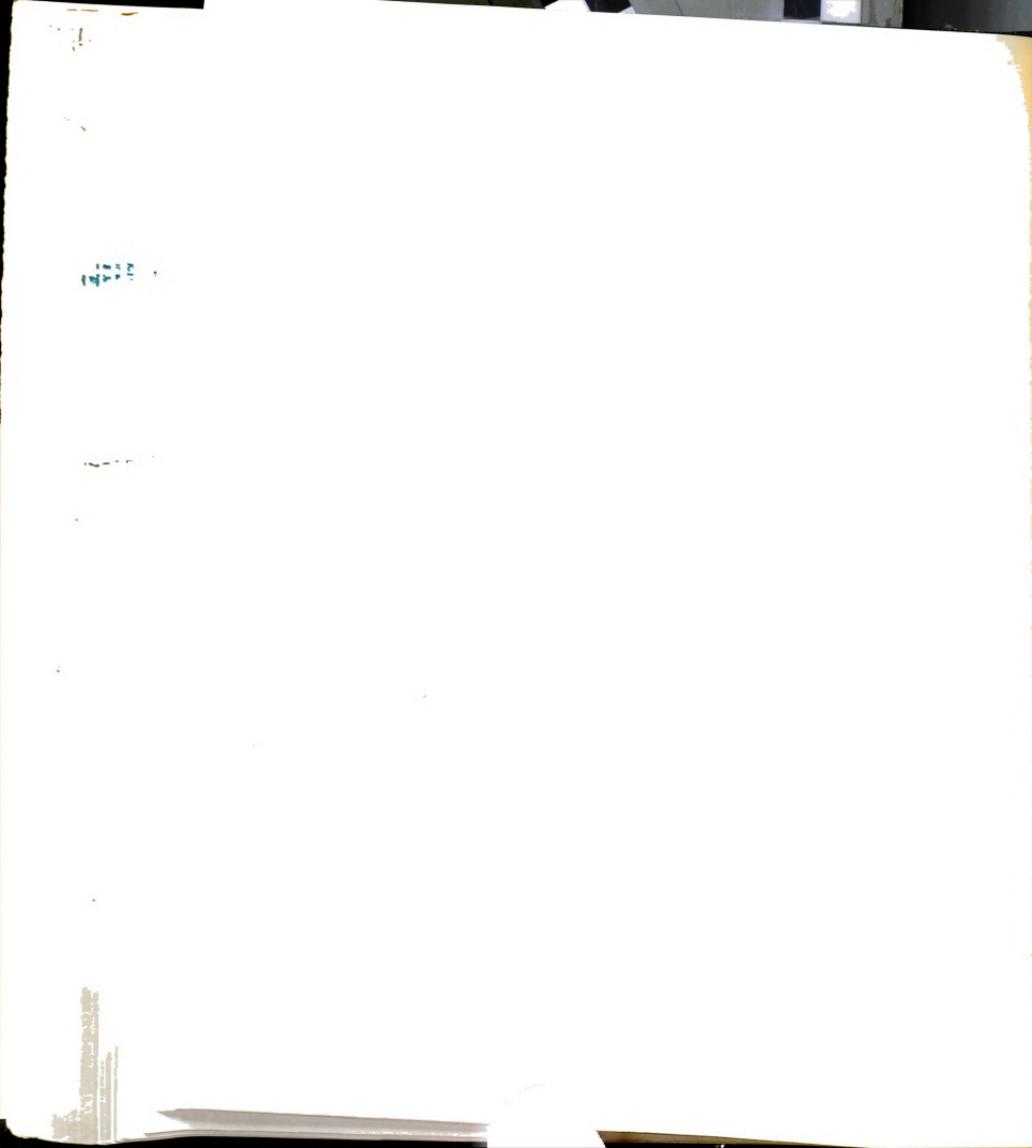
Witnessing the sharp contrasts between wealth and poverty, Parke Godwin, a New York newspaper man and Fourier socialist, came to the conclusion that "our modern world of industry is a veritable HELL" in which "the few rich are becoming more and more rich," while "the unnumbered many are becoming poorer." "Was the penalty of Sisyphus," he asked, "condemned to roll his stone to a summit from which it was forever falling, more poignant than that of many fathers of families, among the poorer classes, who, after laboring to exhaustion during their whole lives, to amass somewhat for their old age or for their children, see it swallowed up in one of those periodical crises of failure and ruin which are the inevitable attendants of our methods of loose competition?"44 By the 1850's this would not have seemed a bad question to many New York laborers. Thousands of workingmen,

native-born and foreign alike, were living in an environment in which equality of opportunity in the American race for riches was clearly lacking.

II

Naturally laborers did not accept their declining position in society without attempting once again to organize and better their lot. However, the same factors that were making wages lower and workers less independent, industrialization and the mounting tide of immigration, hindered any effective large scale organization of labor. After the collapse of the labor movement following the panic of 1837, workers found it difficult to revive the flourishing trade union activity of the thirties. The atmosphere of the 1840's was different for labor than in the preceding decade. Full scale immigration created a labor surplus, making it nearly impossible to unionize effectively; while at the same time the traditional crafts were being replaced or greatly modified by mechanical processes. Under these circumstances the leadership of the labor movement temporarily passed into the hands of humanitarian reformers, usually middle-class idealists who believed strongly in a single panacea to end the ills of industrialization.⁴⁵

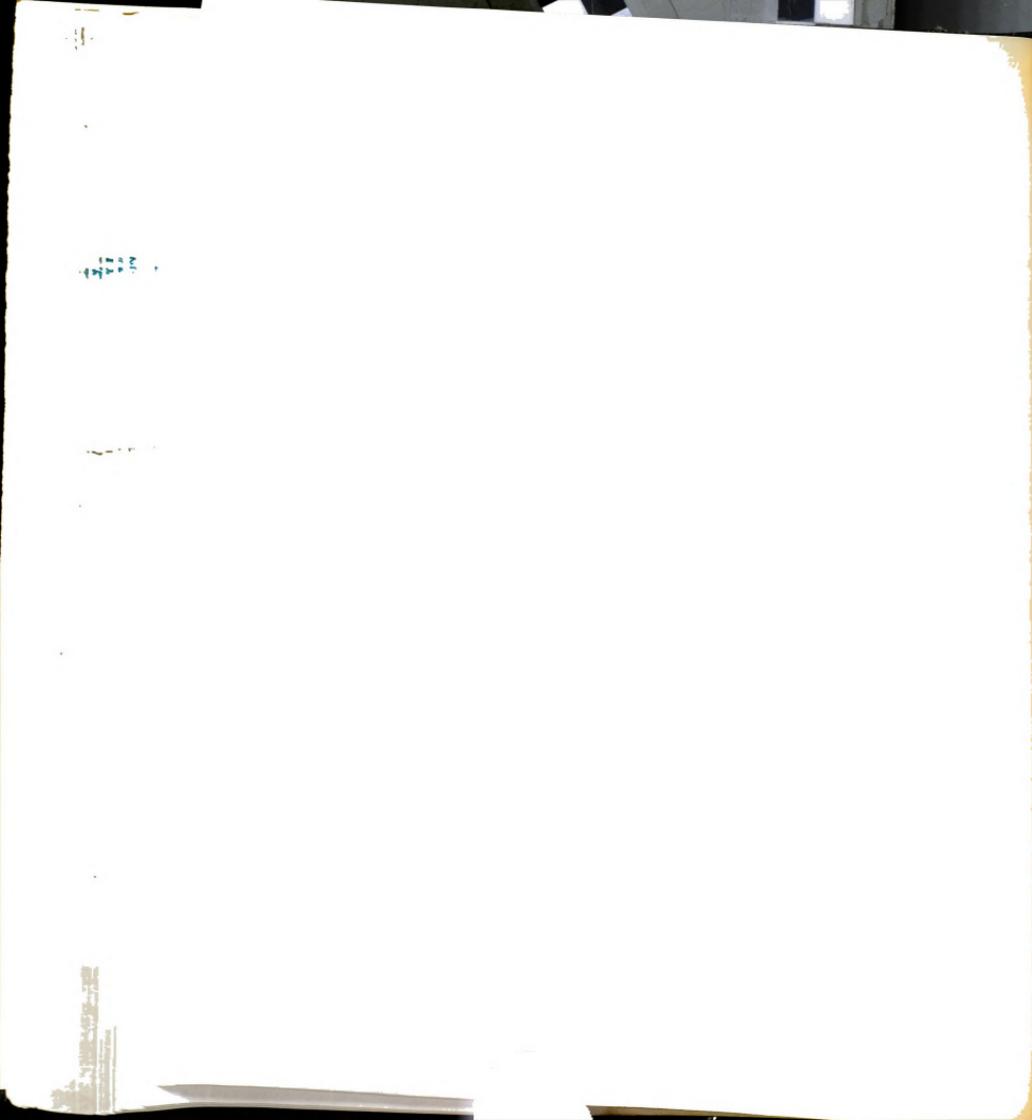
Associationism, Fourierism, agrarianism, socialism, and communitarianism vied with one another to win the support of the workingman and transform the chaotic, capitalistic



industrial society into an utopia. In New York the concepts of Fourier socialism were particularly propagated. Charles Fourier, a French commercial employee, assumed as had Robert Owen and other communitarian reformers, that man was basically good, and that if men abandoned the competitive system and joined in "phalanxes," or cooperative communities, they could transform the world into a paradise. Fourier believed that the difficulty with modern society was that men's natural abilities were misused. In his communities talents would be fully utilized and harmony would prevail.⁴⁶

Fourier, who never visited America, had waited for ten years for a wealthy patron to finance his project. When he died in 1837 he had not found any rich backers.⁴⁷ However, his ideas had reached Albert Brisbane, a young man from western New York, who had become familiar with the Frenchman's work while a student in France. In the depression year of 1840 Brisbane published Social Destiny of Man, a detailed exposition of Fourier's ideas. Brisbane won the support of Horace Greeley to his schemes, and Greeley contributed both money and newspaper space to support "industrial association" as the Fourier system was called.⁴⁸

Supporters of Associationism were successful in establishing Fourier societies in many eastern states. In New York societies existed in the City, in Rochester, Buffalo, Albany, and many other towns. Brisbane, early in 1843, reported in the Tribune after a tour of New York State that

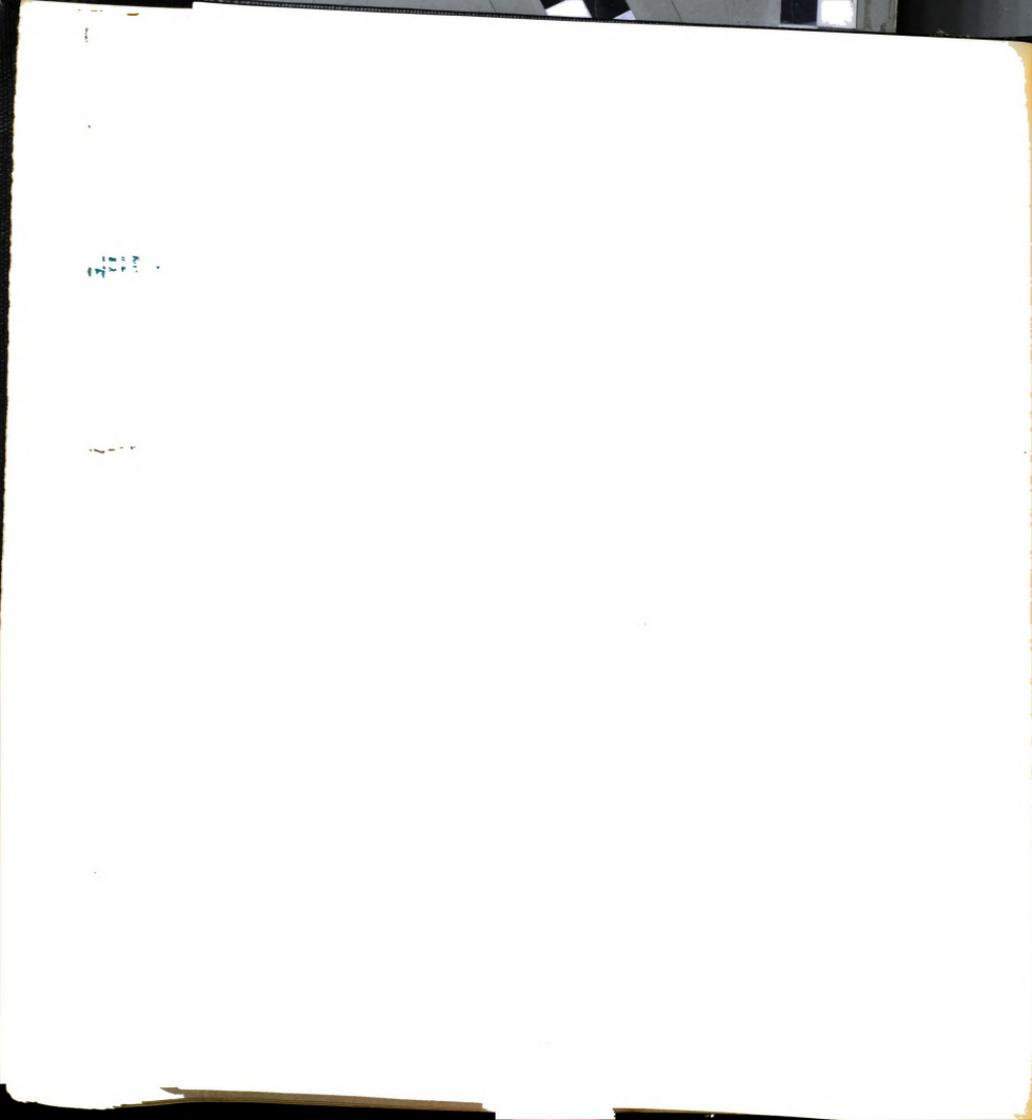


"in all the principal towns and many of the smaller ones the people are taking up the subject with the greatest enthusiasm and energy--forming societies for the dissemination of the doctrines and organizing small associations."⁴⁹

During the forties more than forty different Fourier phalanxes were established, with perhaps 8,000 members. These communities attracted persons from all ranks of society, including many skilled mechanics who saw in Associationism a chance to overcome the evils of industrialization. The first community was founded in western Pennsylvania in 1843 by a group of skilled craftsmen from Albany and New York City. It failed the following year. In the next ten years virtually all the other phalanxes similarly failed, including the transcendental haven of Brook Farm and Brisbane's own community, the North American Phalanx.⁵⁰

Communitarian societies such as the Fourier phalanxes may have had some value as social laboratories, but they did not help to alleviate the problems of the working class. Their chief flaw undoubtedly lay in the fact that they were a quixotic attempt to escape from industrialization and not to come to grips with it. Besides this, the history of most of these communities was marked by internal bickerings, poor planning, and lack of capital.⁵¹

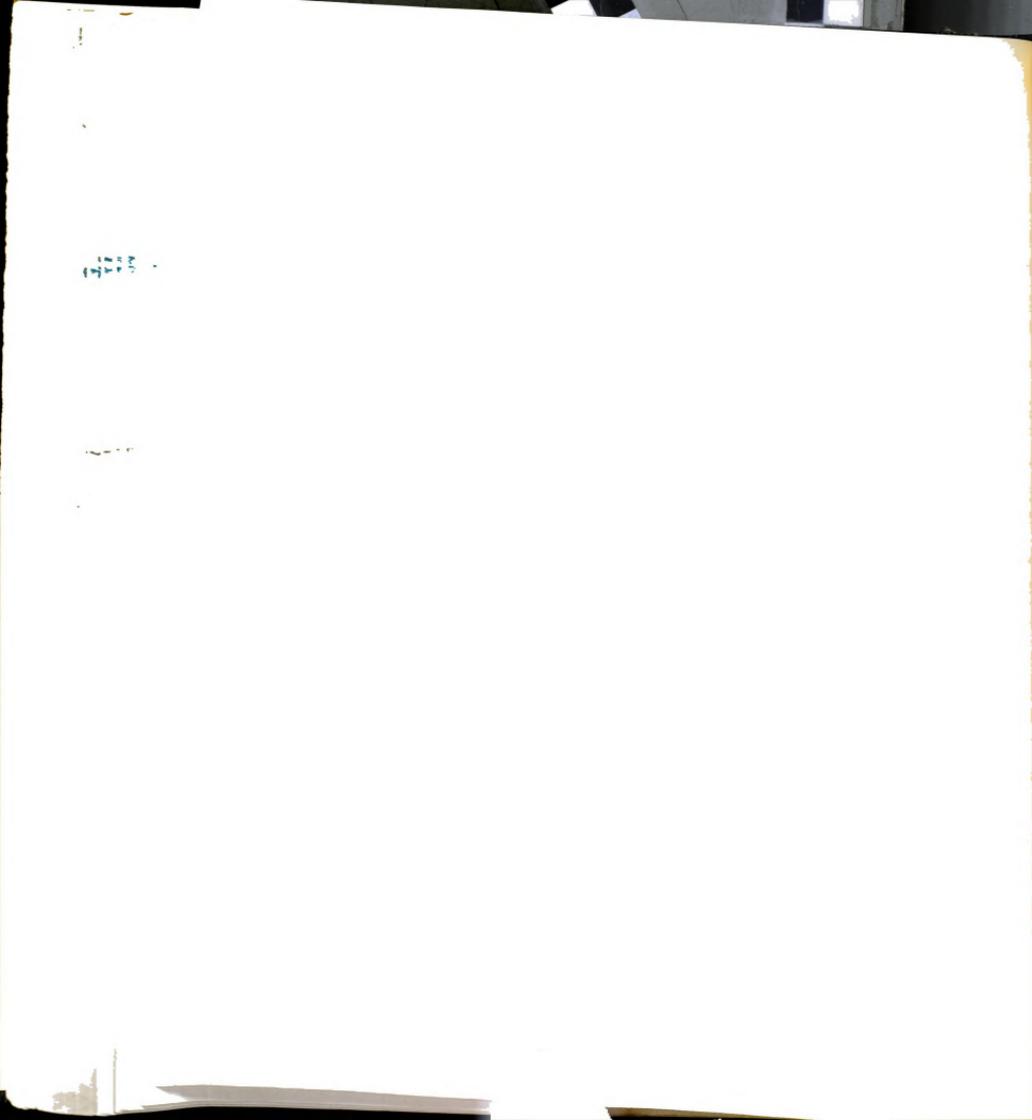
Greeley and a number of other reformers turned in the late forties to encourage laborers within industrial towns and cities to form both consumers' and producers' cooperatives.



For a time craftsmen in a number of trades were successful in establishing worker-owned shops. In New York City in the spring of 1850 groups of coopers, hat finishers, shade painters, German cabinetmakers, and tailors reportedly had organized cooperatives.⁵² Similar consumers' cooperatives were established to sell goods at wholesale prices to members. But these ventures were in the long run no more successful than the phalanxes. Few survived beyond the mid-fifties, and their overall effect on working conditions was negligible.⁵³

Well before the final demise of the communitarian and cooperative movements a new panacea, land reform, had gained wide support. This was undoubtedly the most practical of all the cure-alls offered by middle-class reformers. The high priest of the land reform movement was George Henry Evans, the former publisher of the Working Man's Advocate. Evans revived the Advocate in 1844, and sought to rally workers behind a plan to secure national legislation providing for a division of the public domain into free 160 acre homesteads. To further propagandize for his scheme, Evans founded the National Reform Association in 1845. That year the walls of New York were plastered with handbills titled "Vote Yourself a Farm." "Are you tired of slavery," the handbill asked, "of drudging for others--of poverty and its attendant miseries? Then, Vote yourself a farm."⁵⁴

In viewing the working situation in the industrial



towns of the East a committee of the National Reform Association found "a much larger number of laboring people . . . than can find constant and profitable employment." In addition to this the committee reported that "we find in our cities, and Factory Stations, an increasing population, the great majority of whom depend for a subsistence on Mechanical labor; and . . . we find the new born power of machinery throwing itself into the labor-market, with the most astounding effects--withering up all human competition with a sudden decisiveness that leaves no hope for the future." The committee's solution was "at once simple, satisfactory, and conclusive. . . . Let an outlet be formed that will carry off our superabundant labor to the salubrious and fertile West. In those regions thousands, and tens of thousands, who are now languishing in hopeless poverty, will find a certain and a speedy independence. The labor market will be thus eased of the present distressing competition, and those who remain, as well as those who emigrate, will have the opportunity of realizing a comfortable living."⁵⁵

Although not all laborers were taken up with land reform, many skilled mechanics rallied strongly to the National Reform Association and the free land program. For example, the first central committee included four printers, two cordwainers, a chairmaker, a bookbinder, a blacksmith, a picture-frame maker, a carpenter, a machinist, and a clothier. Several of these men had been active in the



labor activity of the thirties.⁵⁶ Labor journals, immigrant guide books, Greeley's Tribune, and reform publications generally, supported the land reform movement. Up until the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 strong pressure was put on politicians through the National Reform Association and other agencies to pass such legislation. In New York, particularly as poverty and working conditions worsened, support for free land became very general. Not only did the Tribune support this among the major city papers but also the Times and the Sun in the 1850's. Convinced that charity within the city was a waste, the latter paper recommended in 1855 that instead of "soup houses we ought to send the unemployed where they can obtain work and good wages."⁵⁷

While the movement initiated by Evans helped lead to the passage of the Homestead Act, its benefit to New York workers in the forties and fifties seems to have been unimportant. Historians have shown that relatively few wage earners and artisans in New York State cities became western farmers.⁵⁸ The same factors which made it difficult for newly arrived immigrants to extricate themselves from east coast cities also affected native laborers. Aside from the fact that many preferred urban life to rural was the general lack of funds to travel, buy land, and begin a successful farm. An English traveller visiting America in 1843 asked a group of obviously exploited factory workers why they did not leave the mill and go to the land. They replied:

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We should want money to travel, then money would be wanted to buy land, to buy agricultural implements, to buy seed, and then we should want more to support us till we could dispose of part of our crops, and we have no money at all. But, suppose we had all these means, we know nothing about cultivation of land--we have all our lives worked in a factory, and know no other employment, and how is it likely that we should succeed? besides which, we have always been used to live in a town, where we can get what little things we want if we have money, and it is only those who have lived in the wilderness, who know what the horrors of a wilderness-life are.⁵⁹

Money was least available for an urban exodus during times of depression, with the result that people went West chiefly during prosperous times and not when this movement would do the most to relieve unemployment and low wages in the cities.⁶⁰

Throughout the period from 1830 to 1860 as transportation improved the trans-Appalachian lands were increasingly used to raise staple crops. The days of the squatters were passing, and in their place came a new class of substantial farmers. Unlike the earlier pioneers, the successful farmers of this era were those who bought improved lands at good prices. In order to compete with this group one needed fertile land, costly machinery, and labor. There was some opportunity for an eastern laborer to find employment as a farm hand, but even this was precarious. As Mathew Carey remarked in the early thirties:

It is frequently said, as a panacea for the distresses of those people--"let them go into the country; there they will find employment enough." To say nothing of the utter unfitness of most of those persons for country labour, this is taking for granted what remains to be proved. The country rarely affords employment for extra hands, except for a few weeks in

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harvest time. Farmers are generally supplied with steady hands at all other seasons. But . . . take the case of a man of a delicate constitution, with a wife and three or four small children; what a miserable chance would he stand of support by country labor!⁶¹

Although the number of laborers moving to the West remained small, that region was being populated and this in itself undoubtedly did make American society more mobile than in industrialized countries without a frontier. However, this safety valve was more than offset in New York State by the great influx of immigrants and by the movement of native Americans from the country to the city. Western settlement throughout this period lagged behind urban growth. The result was a lowering of the standards of the industrial population in spite of the benefits of abundant land.⁶²

Workers were coming to realize by the late forties that industrialization could not be stopped or society radically altered through any of the simple solutions offered by the numerous utopian reformers. But at the same time, organizing a genuine labor movement to work for such practical measures as shorter hours and better wages proved exceedingly difficult. During the forties, however, there was renewed agitation for a ten-hour work day. This movement took the form of pressuring state legislatures to pass laws limiting the hours in private industry. In New York, Evan's National Reform Association and other workingmen's organizations took up this cause. Tammany Democrats, hoping to win worker support, introduced a ten-hour bill in 1847, but the

measure was never voted on. Several other attempts to pass ten-hour legislation succeeded in the Assembly, only to be defeated in the more conservative Senate. In 1853, a ten-hour law was passed for labor employed on public works. However, this was only in the absence of contracts and thus proved virtually meaningless. No further legislation on the question of shorter hours was brought up in New York until 1859.⁶³ The average workday throughout the forties and fifties remained well over the ten-hour goal, although there seems to have been a slight reduction in the average daily hours during the period.⁶⁴

Unions had been slow to reorganize during the forties, but after 1850, a sharp rise in living costs due to the California gold discoveries together with renewed prosperity turned skilled workers back to union activity. Between 1850 and 1854 most of the craft trades in New York unionized. At this time labor made a conscious effort to extricate itself from the humanitarianism of the forties. The pioneer labor historian J. R. Commons has called this period the beginning of modern trade unionism. "There is," he writes, "an impressive difference between the 'pure and simple' unionism of the middle of the decade and the unionism of the thirties, the forties, and the beginning of this decade. Stripped of universal and glowing ideals, without establishing a single labour paper to carry an appeal to the country, the skilled trades settled down to the cold business of getting more pay

for themselves by means of permanent and exclusive organizations. Here begins that separation from common labour which eventually was to raise the pay of the skilled mechanic far above the level of immigrant competition and to distinguish American unionism from that of any other country."⁶⁵

Skilled labor organized much more clearly along class lines, excluding both common laborers and middle-class reformers. There was a distinct recognition that their struggle against employers would be far more effective if they demanded limited "bread and butter" objectives such as higher pay, a minimum wage, maintenance of apprenticeship rules, collective bargaining, the closed shop, and shorter hours. This entailed an acceptance of inequality in that these workers by forming tightly organized craft unions were claiming that their interests were not the general interests of society. Workers now realized, as one union declared, that under existing conditions "there exists a perpetual antagonism between Labor and Capital . . . one striving to sell their labor for as much, and the other striving to buy it for as little as they can."⁶⁶

The chief weapon of these newly organized unions was again the strike. In 1850 New York carpenters, cordwainers, bootmakers, bricklayers, painters, printers, and certain common laborers struck, chiefly for higher wages.⁶⁷ In 1853 and 1854 the number of strikes increased markedly. "Each spring," reported the Tribune, "witnesses a new struggle

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for enhanced wages in some if not most of the trades of this and other cities."⁶⁸ On occasion as many as twenty-five or thirty strikes were cited in one issue of the Tribune or Times.⁶⁹ These strikes were partially successful in raising the wages of skilled mechanics. Times were prosperous and labor was in demand. In certain trades wages rose as much as 37½ percent from 1850 to 1854.⁷⁰ However, prices were rising nearly as rapidly, and, except in a few trades, wages did not keep pace. Employers took every opportunity to weaken the unions and were often successful during slack seasons in driving down newly won wage increases.⁷¹

Just as in the thirties, the labor organizations of the fifties proved to be precarious institutions, dependent on general prosperity for their very existence. The sharp recession during the winter of 1854-55 adversely effected organized labor. Skilled mechanics were laid off in large numbers in the fall and early winter of 1854. In December less than one-fifth of the building workers in New York City were employed. By mid-winter over one-half of the nation's skilled laborers were out of work. Unable to maintain wage gains or keep workers employed, the trade union movement collapsed.⁷²

Business picked up again in the summer of 1855, and the few unions that had survived led in an attempt to rebuild the movement. By the summer of 1856 unions had revived somewhat and were again able to force better terms from their

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employers.

However, before these reorganized unions had made any significant gains, the depression of 1857 once more destroyed the movement even more completely than had been the case in 1854-55. By October, 1857, at least 200,000 were unemployed. Immigrant laborers crowded the New York docks begging for the opportunity of working their way back to Europe.⁷³ On November 2, 1857, some 12,000 unemployed New York City workers met in Tompkins Square to take "prompt, vigorous and decisive action to prevent our families from starving."⁷⁴

Three days later, November 5, 1857, a meeting 15,000 strong again gathered at Tompkins Square. A parade was formed and thousands of unemployed workers marched down Wall Street chanting: "We want work."⁷⁵ Later, desperate New York workers broke into the shops of flour merchants and stole goods to keep their families alive. Some public relief as well as public works projects were established to aid the large number of jobless. Workers were employed in grading Central Park and in pulling down an old almshouse on Chambers Street.⁷⁶ However, unemployment and low wages remained in the years just before the Civil War. Unions did begin to build up again by 1859 and 1860, but their impact was slight. Generally working conditions were as bad if not worse in the late fifties than they had been at the beginning of the decade.⁷⁷

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III

An old New York cartman, one of those human-haulers who transported much of the city's goods before the advent of motorized trucks, made the following comparison of working conditions in the late fifties with those of the thirties:

There is one thing . . . that is quite certain. With all her glitter of prosperity, and her rapid increase of wealth and population, New York is not now the place for a poor man that it was when I first took up my residence there. Then there was plenty of work for all; wages were high, and all the necessaries of life were low in price and better in quality than they are at present; now wages are low, work scarce, and all the necessaries of life poor and high in price. Then you could hire good, comfortable apartments for \$75 a year; now the same accommodations will cost you twice that amount for the same space. . . . Then the farmers brought their own produce to market, and you could go down to the wharves and purchase at retail anything you wanted from first hands; now you cannot purchase anything from first hands at all, but have to pay two or three commissions upon every articles you obtain from the markets. . . . Then the working-man was looked upon and treated as a human being; now he is looked upon and treated more like a brute than like a man and brother. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that New York has been growing great, without growing good.⁷⁸

Obviously this nostalgic reminiscence paints an exaggerated picture of the changes that had taken place in laboring conditions between the Jacksonian period and the Civil War. But there exists ample evidence to the effect that the laborer's situation had declined over these three decades. Horace Greeley, reflecting on the changes in New York between the early thirties and 1850, stated that while the city's population and wealth had more than doubled the

conditions of labor had not improved, and in fact had worsened since rents and living expenses had greatly increased while wages remained the same. Greeley was particularly struck by the close connection of low wages to vice, poverty, and destitution. Ten-thousand poor women, he maintained, "because they cannot acquire by any sort of honest industry" more than \$2 per week were driven in infamy. "Thousands of poor children are daily driven forth from the cellars and wretched rookeries of this Christian emporium to gain by thieving or the most horrid pollutions the means of their own and their parents' subsistence."⁷⁹

Signs of poverty multiplied yearly in New York, reflecting low wages, unemployment and worsening labor conditions. In the mid-forties there were 76 pawn shops in the City. By 1860 they numbered in the hundreds. As might be expected the pawnbroker never located in the fashionable neighborhoods. Rather his three gold balls gleamed out of the city's slums.⁸⁰

Begging in the streets greatly increased during the period. In the thirties it was rare to see a beggar, but by the Civil War there were several thousand engaged in this occupation. Greeley termed New York of the fifties "the metropolis of beggary," while a Londoner of the same period found little difference between the begging in his native city and that in the greatest city of the New World. Even a class of professional beggars practiced their art along

with those who were truly destitute.⁸¹

Immigration, industrialization, and the growth of urban areas greatly enlarged the number of persons classified as "paupers" in New York State. In 1823 only 22,111 received poor relief out of a population of 1,500,000; in 1855 the state census listed over 204,000 paupers on relief out of a total population approximating 3,400,000.⁸² The suffering of these paupers was severe. "The truth is," wrote G. G. Foster in 1850, "that the condition, both moral and physical, in which such a city as New York permits its poor to exist, is utterly disgraceful--not to the poor, for they deserve only our deepest pity, but to the community--the powerful, enlightened, wealthy community--which permits its unfortunate children who know nothing but how to work, to become thus horribly degraded."⁸³

During periods of panic and depression, of course, poverty was far more general than usual. In November, 1858, when the unemployed numbered well over 50,000 in New York City alone, some cruel joker advertised a dole of bread and meat to all the poor people present at noon in Union Square on Thanksgiving Day. Several thousand lean, weary people came and waited for hours in vain.⁸⁴

Not all of the hardships of labor were the result of low wages and periodic unemployment. Norman Ware, the leading authority on American labor conditions in the two decades before the Civil War, maintains that "the losses of

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the industrial worker in the first half of the century were not comfort losses solely, but losses, as he conceived it, of status and independence."⁸⁵ Skilled mechanics, as has been shown, yearly found their independence lessening and their skills declining in value. In industry after industry artisans felt themselves challenged by new methods which required little skill or training. "Boys do the work which men are wanting," complained a group of New York printers, "and at half, or less than half, men's wages."⁸⁶ Another group complained that "the capitalists have taken to bossing all the mechanical trades, while the practical mechanic has become a journeyman, subject to be discharged at every pretended 'miff' of his purse-proud employer."⁸⁷

Even when skilled workers were able to win such benefits as higher wages and shorter hours their sense of loss was not offset. Shorter hours were often accompanied by a speed up of production which entailed a tightening of discipline over workers and a further loss of independence. Higher wages in most instances were eradicated by rising living costs. Even the best paid employees found themselves falling behind in the American quest for the Almighty Dollar since the share of the worker in the general prosperity was not commensurate with that of other factors in production.⁸⁸

With the triumph of mechanization and the replacement of the craftshop by the factory the artisan lost his earlier position in the community. Instead of selling his

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product he was selling his labor; he no longer owned the tools of production. As more and more workers became mere wage earners in the aristocratic factory system the general dignity of labor diminished. The great use of cheap immigrant labor also made laboring less respectable than it had been. Mechanics employed in factories began to consider themselves as "wage slaves" in a very real sense.

There was little that the worker could do to escape the system. No longer did apprentices and journeymen have much hope of one day becoming independent, shop-owning masters. During this time in the cities and factory towns the worker became more and more divorced from his former rural agricultural ties. A large class of laborers became completely dependent on the industrial system. For the majority of workers, whether native or foreign-born, this brought great hardships, often entailing long hours spent at tedious routine work. Lacking capital reserve, and working for wages that were seldom above a subsistence level, the laborer had little opportunity to better his position. By the Civil War there existed a sizable pauperized proletariat in New York State.

FOOTNOTES

¹Greeley, Recollections of a Busy Life (New York, 1868), p. 144; The New Yorker, January 20, 1838; for other accounts of the suffering during the depression see: Frederick Marryat, A Diary in America (Paris, 1839), p. 17; Levi Beardsley, Reminiscences (New York, 1852), p. 328; John R. Commons and others, History of Labour in the United States (4 vols., New York, 1918-35), I, 456-57.

²Samuel Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression, 1837-1843," in American Historical Review, XL (July, 1935), 664.

³The New Yorker, July 24, 1841.

⁴Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 463-64.

⁵The Knickerbocker, IX (May, 1838), 488.

⁶Arcturus, I (February, 1841), 133; Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression," pp. 665-76.

⁷Quoted in: Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression," p. 666; see also: Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths: the Discovery of Poverty in the United States (New York, 1956), pp. 13-15.

⁸Quoted in Greeley, Recollections, p. 145.

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⁹Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America (New York, 1960 ed.), pp. 77-78; Philip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States (2 vols., New York, 1947), I, 168.

¹⁰John R. Commons and others, eds., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society (10 vols., Cleveland, 1910), VII, 47-48.

¹¹Dulles, Labor in America, p. 77.

¹²Working Man's Advocate, March 30, 1844.

¹³Dulles, Labor in America, p. 78.

¹⁴Commons and others, Documentary History, VII, 217-18.

¹⁵Junius H. Browne, The Great Metropolis (Hartford, 1869), p. 548; Thomas Mooney, Nine Years in America (Dublin, 1850), p. 82.

¹⁶David M. Schneider, The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1609-1866 (Chicago, 1938), pp. 296-97.

¹⁷New York Times, November 8, 1853.

¹⁸New York Daily Tribune, March 27, 1851.

¹⁹Mooney, Nine Years in America, p. 22; Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 220; Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 487-88.

²⁰Samuel I. Prime, Life in New York (New York, 1847), p. 95.

²¹Brace, The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them (New York, 1872), pp. 168-70.

²²The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York (New York, 1845), pp. 6-7.

²³New York Panorama (New York, 1938), p. 429.

²⁴Charles H. Haswell, Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York (New York, 1896), p. 332.

²⁵Quoted in New York Panorama, p. 430.

²⁶Descriptions of New York City's tenements abound in the literature of the period. See: Mathew H. Smith, Sunshine and Shadow in New York (Hartford, 1868), p. 365; Peter Stryker, The Lower Depths of the Great American Metropolis (New York, 1866), p. 10; James D. Burn, Three Years Among the Working Classes in the United States During the War (London, 1865), p. 8; Griscom, Sanitary Conditions, pp. 6-15; D. W. Mitchell, Ten Years in the United States (London, 1862), pp. 145, 156-57.

²⁷Brace, The Dangerous Classes of New York, pp. 54-56.

²⁸John F. Maguire, The Irish in America (London, 1868), p. 221; Brace, The Dangerous Classes of New York, p. 53.

²⁹Dickens, American Notes for General Circulation (New York, 1942 ed.), pp. 399-402.

³⁰Smith, Sunshine and Shadow, pp. 205-06; for other descriptions of the Five Points area see: Putnam's Monthly Magazine, I (May, 1853), 510-11; Adolph B. Benson, ed., America in the Fifties: Letters of Fredrika Bremer (New York, 1924), pp. 325-26; W. S. Tryon, ed., My Native Land (Chicago, 1952), p. 116.

³¹The Sanitary Condition, pp. 8-10.

³²Robert Ernst, Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863 (New York, 1949), p. 49.

³³Maguire, Irish in America, pp. 225-26.

³⁴Griscom, The Sanitary Condition, pp. 10, 26.

³⁵Stryker, The Lower Depths, pp. 3-4; Smith, Sunshine and Shadow, pp. 2-5.

³⁶Quoted in: Maguire, Irish in America, p. 227; see also: Griscom, The Sanitary Condition, p. 6.

³⁷Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols., New York, 1928-44), I, 401.

³⁸Griscom, The Sanitary Condition, pp. 7-8, 46-47.

³⁹Allan Nevins and Milton H. Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong (3 vols., New York, 1953), II, 177.

⁴⁰Mitchell, Ten Years in the United States, pp. 146-47. Mitchell found the sanitary condition of New York far inferior to that of London.

⁴¹Maguire, Irish in America, p. 229; Brace, The Dangerous Classes, pp. 25-29, 57.

⁴²New York Daily Tribune, February 9, 1850.

⁴³Prime, Life in New York, p. 91.

⁴⁴Parke Godwin, Democracy, Constructive and Pacific (1844) in Merle Curti, Willard Thorp, and Carlos Baker, eds., American Issues: The Social Record (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 412-14.

⁴⁵Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 493-96; Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (New York, 1962 ed.), p. 196.

⁴⁶Edmund Wilson, To the Finland Station (Garden City, New York, 1955), pp. 86-91; Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 496-97.

⁴⁷Wilson, To the Finland Station, p. 91.

⁴⁸Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 174-75.

⁴⁹Quoted in Ibid., I, 176; Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of American Industrial Society, VII, 185-87.

⁵⁰Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 176-78; Dulles, Labor in America, p. 81.

⁵¹Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 505-06.

⁵²New York Daily Tribune, August 12, 13, 15, 1850.

⁵³Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 506-510; Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 178-83.

⁵⁴Commons and others, eds., Documentary History of American Industrial Society, VII, 305-307.

⁵⁵Ibid., VII, 294-305.

⁵⁶Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 531-32.

⁵⁷New York Sun, January 13, February 21, 1855; New York Times, July 25, 1853.

⁵⁸See: Carl N. Degler, "The West as a Solution to Urban Unemployment," New York History, LIII (April, 1955), 63-84; David M. Ellis et al., Short History of New York State (Ithaca, 1957), p. 291.

⁵⁹Commons and others, Documentary History of American Industrial Society, VII, 54-55.

⁶⁰James A. Frost, Life on the Upper Susquehanna (New York, 1951), pp. 121-22; Degler, "The West as a Solution to Urban Unemployment," pp. 78-79; Robert Riegel, Young America, 1830-1840 (Norman, Oklahoma, 1949), pp. 52-53.

⁶¹Appeal to the Wealthy of the Land (Philadelphia, 1833), p. 8.

⁶²Norman Ware, The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860 (Boston, 1924), pp. xx, 1; Riegel, Young America, pp. 97-98.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial statements. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses and income. The document provides a detailed list of items that should be tracked, such as inventory levels, accounts payable, and accounts receivable. It also outlines the procedures for recording these transactions, including the use of double-entry bookkeeping and the importance of regular reconciliations.

The second part of the document focuses on the analysis of the recorded data. It explains how to interpret the financial statements to identify trends and potential areas of concern. Key indicators such as profit margins, liquidity ratios, and debt-to-equity ratios are discussed. The document provides examples of how to calculate these ratios and how to compare them against industry benchmarks. It also offers advice on how to use this information to make informed business decisions and to identify opportunities for cost reduction and revenue growth.

The final part of the document discusses the importance of transparency and communication in financial reporting. It stresses that stakeholders, including investors, creditors, and management, should have access to accurate and timely financial information. The document provides guidelines for preparing financial reports that are clear, concise, and easy to understand. It also discusses the role of internal controls in ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the financial data.

⁶³Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 542-43; Joseph G. Rayback, A History of American Labor (New York, 1959), p. 96.

⁶⁴Both Foner and Rayback, using the same statistics, maintain that the general tendency was toward shorter hours. However, this inference is based on the reported hours of a very limited number of establishments. Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 218; Rayback, A History of American Labor, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁵Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 575-76; see also: Rayback, A History of American Labor, pp. 104-05; Dulles, Labor in America, pp. 88-89.

⁶⁶Quoted in Dulles, Labor in America, p. 89.

⁶⁷Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 576.

⁶⁸New York Daily Tribune, April 20, 1854.

⁶⁹Commons and others, History of Labour, I, 607-608.

⁷⁰Ibid., I, 610-11.

⁷¹Ibid., I, 597, 608-13.

⁷²Ibid., I, 613-14; Rayback, A History of American Labor, p. 105.

⁷³New York Times, October 16, 1857.

⁷⁴New York Herald, November 2, 1857.

⁷⁵New York Daily Tribune, November 6, 1857.

⁷⁶Leah H. Feder, Unemployment Relief in Periods of Depression (New York, 1936), pp. 21, 34; Haswell, Reminiscences, p. 505.

⁷⁷Commons and others, History of Labour, II, 5-12; Foner, History of the Labor Movement, I, 240.

⁷⁸Isaac S. Lyon, Recollections of an Old Cartman (Newark, 1872), pp. 8-9.

⁷⁹New York Daily Tribune, January 18, February 9, 1850.

⁸⁰Prime, Life in New York, pp. 221-23; Browne, The Great Metropolis, p. 474.

⁸¹Browne, The Great Metropolis, pp. 456-65; Greeley, Recollections, pp. 192-83; William Hancock, An Emigrant's Five Years in the Free States of America (London, 1860), p. 185; Lyon, Recollections of an Old Cartman, pp. 27-33.

⁸²Ellis et al., Short History of New York State, p. 315.

⁸³New York by Gas-Light (New York, 1850), p. 123.

⁸⁴Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, II, 422.

⁸⁵Industrial Worker, pp. x-xiv.

⁸⁶Commons and others, Documentary History of American Industrial Society, VII, 110.

⁸⁷State Mechanic [New York], September 10, 1842.

⁸⁸Ware, Industrial Worker, p. xii.

CHAPTER 7

THE NEW ARISTOCRACY

Rapid approximation to the European style of living is more and more observable in this city. The number of servants in livery visibly increases every season. Foreign artistic upholsterers assert that there will soon be more houses in New York furnished according to the fortune and taste of noblemen, than there are either in Paris or London; and this prophecy may well be believed, when the fact is considered that it is already not very uncommon to order furniture for a single room, at the cost of ten thousand dollars.

--L. M. Child
Letters From New York (1845)

There is an untitled aristocracy both in New York and the other great cities of the Union, more haughty and exclusive than any within the region of Belgravia.

--James D. Burn
Three Years Among the Working-Classes in the United States
(1865)

I

Early in 1860, D. Appleton and Company published the first American edition of Darwin's The Origin of Species, which the New York diarist George Templeton Strong found "a shallow book, though laboriously and honestly written."¹ Less intellectual Americans were absorbed at this time by the international prize fight between John C. Heenan of

California, the claimant of the American title, and Tom Sayers, the British champion; a match stopped after forty-two bare-knuckled rounds and declared a draw.² Others were intrigued by such matters as the visit of the first delegation from Japan, or horrified by the news from Lawrence, Massachusetts of the collapse of the Pemberton mill on January 10, killing about two hundred workers, many of whom were women.³ Politics, of course, overshadowed all other concerns in 1860, with the antagonism between North and South moving rapidly toward an open breach. However, in New York, among the best society, the greatest excitement was not occasioned by the election of Lincoln in November, but rather was caused by the social event of the season, the visit of the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, who arrived in New York on October 11.⁴

New York's elite pondered for months how to make a good impression on the nineteen-year-old Prince. A committee of some fifty leading citizens headed by General Winfield Scott, William B. Astor, and Peter Cooper planned a great ball and reception for the British heir on his arrival in the city. For weeks before his coming the newspapers played up the preparations being made to receive royalty. On the day of the Prince's arrival Strong, who was a member of the planning committee, wrote: "Everybody has talked of nothing but His Royal Highness for the last week. . . . I fear we are a city of snobs."⁵

More than 200,000 New Yorkers crowded Broadway on October 11 to witness the parade and hopefully glimpse the Prince being pulled in a six-horse barouche. Baron Salomon de Rothschild, residing in New York at the time, gave the following description of the event:

Try to imagine all the ships in the port and in the bay decorated with flags; the army and the whole militia under arms, passing in review, and following along, the Prince's coach; and a population of a million people sticking their heads out of the windows and jamming into all the streets along his route. These poor people waited without a murmur from ten or eleven o'clock in the morning to seven at night, the military review having delayed the royal cortège considerably. When it finally arrived, it was already dark; it was impossible to see anything, but you should have heard the frenzied "hurrahs" of these good republicans, who greeted the royal scion with more enthusiasm than they would have shown for a liberator of their own country.⁶

The parade was for the many; the grand ball on the following night was for the few. The New York Times felt it incongruous that only the "aristocracy" had been invited to this affair, excluding even the city Alderman. But it was evident that the great interest taken in the Prince's reception among the upper classes resulted from the fact that the guest list for the ball indicated who was "in society" and who was not.⁷ New York's "best society" crowded into the Academy of Music to be present with royalty. Lesser nobles were forgotten; when Baron Rothschild arrived an hour before the Prince "his coming," according to the Times, "created no sensation."⁸

At ten in the evening the Prince was led in by the reception committee headed by the wealthy and aristocratic Hamilton Fish and followed by the iron and glue magnate Peter Cooper, looking in Strong's words "like one of Gulliver's Yahoos caught and cleaned and dressed up." Unfortunately as people crowded in to watch the first Quadrille d'Honneur part of the temporary dance floor collapsed. However, order was quickly restored, and soon the dancing was resumed.⁹ Even the worldly Baron Rothschild remarked on the brilliance of the occasion: "There were dresses of an elegance and sumptuousness without compare, magnificently beautiful jewelry; but what ought particularly to have struck the young Prince . . . was the immense number of pretty women who were present. As a matter of fact I have never in my life seen such a collection."¹⁰

The dinner prepared by Delmonico's was as unrepublican as possible, running from Consummé de Volaille through dozens of courses concluding with Glaces à la Vanille and Charlottes Russes. In the supper room "stood an army of servants, elbow to elbow, all in livery" waiting to serve the guests. Tired but contented New York fashionables having feted a prince finally returned to their mansions as day was dawning.¹¹

A few days later the Prince left New York, continuing his journey to West Point and Boston and then home. In reflecting on the visit Strong drew the following conclusions;



"(1) No community worships hereditary rank and station like a democracy. (2) The biggest and finest specimens of flunkeyism occur in the most recently elevated strata of society, as for example, Cooper: the 'self-made millionaire glue-boiler,' [Charles] Leary: the fashionable hatter's son, and others. (3) Under all this folly and tuft-hunting there is a deep and almost universal feeling of respect and regard for Great Britain and Her Britannic Majesty."¹²

New York's High Society in 1860, of which George Strong was both a member and a critic, was far removed from the staid Knickerbocker elite of the early thirties. In the intervening years a wealthy plutocracy had emerged which included self-made millionaire glue-boilers as well as opulent old family patricians. New Yorkers were, as Strong had concluded, highly status-conscious, probably more so than persons living in the traditionally aristocratic societies of Europe. The very absence of legitimate aristocratic tradition--one in which social rankings were unquestioned--made all Americans emphasize status. And since claim to higher status ran counter to the basic belief that all are socially equal, those claiming a higher station felt compelled continually to assert it. Thus to be present as one of the select guests at a reception for royalty was a means of affirming social position.

More than ever wealth was the distinguishing factor setting off New York's best society. Nearly ten years before

the Prince's ball Strong had noted the tendency of the aristocracy to assert their position by means of conspicuous consumption. "It is terrific to see," wrote Strong, "the strides extravagance and luxury are making in these days. Langdon's arrangements for his ball tonight remind one of the fact. Though I thought a few years ago that I was or might be hereafter tolerably well off, I'm satisfied from the way the style of living grows and amplifies that I am to be always poor, relatively speaking, and perhaps some day an absolute pauper, unable to live in New York."¹³

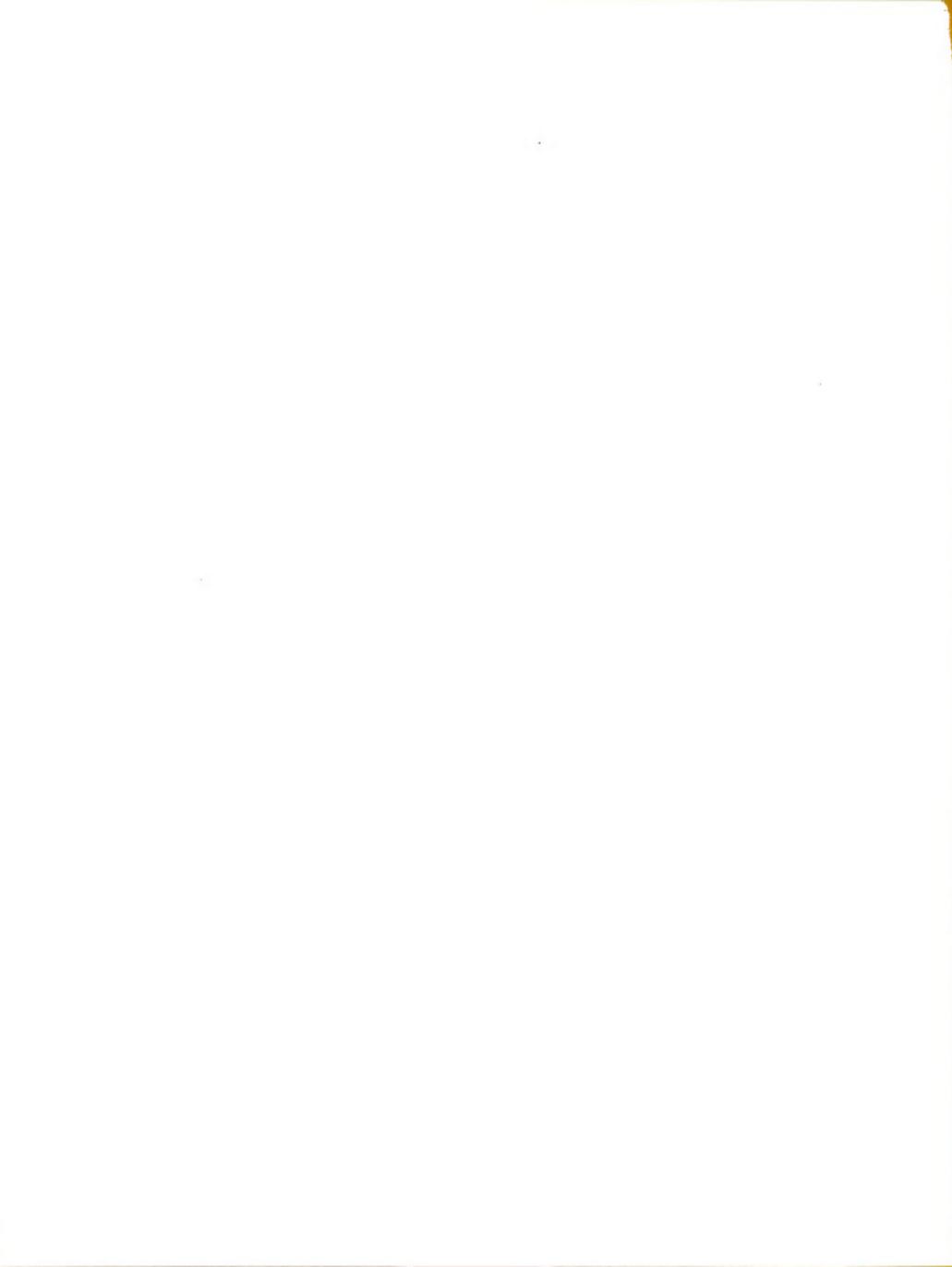
Other New Yorkers ridiculed the spending of the city's socialites. The journalist G. G. Foster called the "aristocracy of the New World--a race of beings who . . . have never been equaled on the face of this earth, in all that is pompous without dignity, gaudy without magnificence, lavish without taste, and aristocratic without good manners."¹⁴ The essayist George William Curtis in his highly popular Potiphar Papers of 1854 wittily satirized the showiest, wealthiest New Yorkers. His fictional characters--the pushy, nouveau riche Mrs. Potiphar, the smug Reverend Cream Cheese, and the gossipy Minerva Tattle--each had a hundred likenesses in New York of the fifties. Curtis began his satire with the following picture of Gotham's social display:

If gilt were only gold, or sugar-candy common sense, what a fine thing our society would be! If to lavish money upon objets de vertu, to wear costly dresses, and always to have them cut in the height of the

fashion; to build houses thirty feet broad, as if they were palaces; to furnish them with all the luxurious devices of Parisian genius; to give superb banquets at which your guests laugh, and which make you miserable; to drive a fine carriage and ape European liveries, and crests, and coats-of-arms; . . . to talk much of "old families" and of your aristocratic foreign friends; to despise labour; to prate of "good society"; to travesty and parody, in every conceivable way, a society which we know only in books and by superficial observation of foreign travel; . . . if all this were fine, what a prodigiously fine society would ours be!¹⁵

The growth of conspicuous and extravagant living was reflected in New York's architectural history. The brick and wooden structures of Knickerbocker New York gave way to the dreary but costly brown sandstone and the more tasteful and still more expensive marble. Wealthy persons who weathered the depression of 1837 generally emerged in the early forties richer than ever, while new fortunes continued to be made. The 950 names that Moses Beach published in 1845 "of persons estimated to be worth \$100,000 and upwards" give some indication of this. These persons continued to push the fashionable section of the city further to the north. As Strong wrote in 1847 when contemplating a move uptown to Gramercy Park: "a street of emigrant boarding houses and dirty drinking shops is not a pleasant place to live."¹⁶

New mansions built around Stuyvesant and Union Squares, Gramercy Park, Fourteenth and Twenty-third Streets and upper Broadway rivaled one another in gaudiness. When the Hungarian liberals Francis and Theresa Pulszky, touring America as guests of the country with the celebrated Louis



Kossuth, arrived in New York in 1851 they were surprised at the numerous substantial dwellings, many with elegant marble facades. Mrs. Pulszky described one especially; lavish house belonging to Dr. Benjamin Haight, an eminent Episcopalian minister. Haight's mansion had "an Italian winter garden, playing fountains, large saloons in the Parisian fashion, a drawingroom in the style of the Taj Mahal at Agra, a splendid library, etc."¹⁷

By the early fifties Fifth Avenue had become the most sumptuous residential street in America. One source relates that three Fifth Avenue dwellings built in the year 1851 had each cost over \$50,000.¹⁸ At the end of the fifties Fifth Avenue from Washington Square to the beginning of Central Park was an almost unbroken line of mansions.¹⁹ Some of the most impressive homes along the Avenue were those of the Brevoorts, Parishes, Astors, Roberts, Rhinelanders, and Minturns.²⁰

The interior furnishings of these nabob palaces often cost more than the dwellings themselves. Massive and ornate furniture became a reflection of wealth and status. Elaborately draped beds were popular; so too were heavy imported silk or satin draperies, usually in floral patterns. Mahogany was the most favored wood in this age of oppressive taste. Equally popular were rosewood and satinwood. Furniture made abundant use of marble and gilt.²¹ Strong, while making the traditional fashionable New Year's Day

calls in 1846, was struck by the interior display at the home of William Aspinwall. "One can't make a satisfactory guess at the amount he's invested in rosewood and satin, mirrors, cabinets, and vertu. . . . [Woodbury] Langdon, William B. Astor, [James F.] Penniman go beyond him in display and costliness. . . . Langdon's arrangements are said to have cost not much less than eighty thousand dollars."²² Another New Yorker described the interior of a \$100,000 mansion on the corner of Fifteenth Street and Fifth Avenue. The lady's bedroom was palatial. The bed was inlaid with pearls and draped with satin and lace; the roof was of glass, framed in arabesque tracery-work. One part of the dwelling was a greenhouse, containing exotic flowers, birds, and a large fountain. Other rooms were walled with mirrors and fine paintings.²³

Wealthy families frequently in the forties and fifties had extensive private libraries and art collections. Both Philip Hone and George Templeton Strong, the two diarists, had excellent collections of American and European art works as well as fine libraries. Probably the best art collection in the city was that of John Taylor Johnson, the first President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art after its founding in 1869. Johnson's marble mansion on the southeast corner of Eighth Street and Fifth Avenue, which was completed in 1855, contained a large art gallery at the rear of the house which he opened to the public one day a week.²⁴ William

Aspinwall, August Belmont, William B. Astor, Cornelius Vanderbilt, A. T. Stewart, and others also had substantial collections of pictures. The practice of scouring Europe for art treasures by rich Americans was already well developed by the Civil War.²⁵

The uptown movement of fashion and the growth of extravagance was witnessed in hotel construction as well as in the houses of the elite. Although many fashionable hotels were built in the 1840's it was not until the opening of the \$1,000,000 Metropolitan Hotel in 1852 that the elegance of the Astor House was eclipsed. Located on the corner of Broadway and Prince Street, the Metropolitan at the time of its opening was considered the world's most luxurious hotel.²⁶ Yet in less than a year a new hostelry, the St. Nicholas Hotel, outclassed even the Metropolitan. James Robertson, an English visitor who stayed at the St. Nicholas in 1854, described it as "perhaps the largest hotel in the world" and certainly "the most comfortable, and the most elegantly furnished in the States."²⁷ The St. Nicholas had a polished white marble front embellished with carving. Inside were thick crimson carpets, satin curtains, velvet covered couches, carved rosewood tables and chairs, and great gilt mirrors. It had over 600 rooms and was staffed by more than 300 servants all in livery. The food and wine were reportedly the best.²⁸



But the pinnacle of pre-Civil War magnificence in hotels was the Fifth Avenue which opened in 1859 on the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-third Street. This hotel had accommodations for 800 guests and contained according to a contemporary report "more than one hundred suites of apartments, each combining the conveniences and luxury of parlor, chamber, dressing, and bathing rooms. All rooms, besides being well lighted and ventilated, will have means of access by a perpendicular railway [elevator] --intersecting each story. . . ."29 It was here that the Prince of Wales stayed on his 1860 visit, and for the next half a century the Fifth Avenue Hotel played a prominent part in New York social life.³⁰

At about the time that the Fifth Avenue Hotel opened, Delmonico's Restaurant, long the most famous and fashionable in the city, confirmed the supremacy of the new center of society by taking over the Grinnell mansion on the Avenue at Fourteenth Street and opening New York's most palatial eating place. Its dining and ball rooms were the scenes of countless gatherings of wealth and fashion. "To lunch, dine, or sup at Delmonico's," noted a contemporary, "is the crowning ambition of those who aspire to notoriety."³¹

There were myriad other ways in which wealthy New Yorkers displayed their riches. Private carriages, not very common in the 1830's, became standard possessions of those with social pretensions in the forties and fifties.

Not only did the number of private equipages yearly increase but it became common to see carriages with heraldic crests and liveried footmen and coachmen.³² In the late fifties the newly opened Central Park became the great display place for fashionable carriages. "On pleasant afternoons," wrote the author of a New York guide book, "the Park presents a brilliant appearance, and reveals not only the worth and wealth, but the pretension and parvenuism of this aristocratic-democratic city. One would hardly believe he was in a republican country to see the escutcheoned panels of the carriages, the liveried coachmen, and the supercilious air of the occupants of the vehicles, as they go pompously and flaringly by."³³

Fine horses, too, were kept by people of wealth. "No man of the world," wrote a New Yorker, "who has liberal means and aspires to fashion, considers his establishment complete without a well-supplied stable." Some men spent hundreds of thousands on trotting horses. The most famous horsemen were Robert Bonner, owner and publisher of The Ledger, and Cornelius Vanderbilt; many others had stables valued anywhere from \$10,000 to over \$100,000.³⁴

The extravagant attire of New York socialites, particularly the ladies, was another visible indication of the great increase in wealth and another symbol of status. A woman complained in 1850 that dress was "running wild, in the direction of expense."³⁵ The British novelist

William Makepeace Thackeray viewed the New York lady's attire more favorably. In his lecture tour of 1852, he was struck by the prodigious luxury in the city. "Surely Solomon in all his glory or the Queen of Sheba when she came to visit him in state was not arrayed so magnificently as these New York damsels. . . . I never saw such luxury and extravagance such tearing polkas such stupendous suppers and fine clothes. I watched one young lady at 4 balls in as many new dresses, and each dress of the most 'stunning' description."³⁶

Women generally followed the latest Parisian fashions in their dress. As the noted geologist Sir Charles Lyell remarked in the mid-forties: "Every fortnight the 'Journal des Modes' is received from France, and the ladies conform strictly to Parisian costume. Except at balls and large parties, they wear high dresses, and, as usual in mercantile communities, spare no expense. Embroidered muslin, of the finest and costliest kind, is much worn; and my wife learnt that sixteen guineas were not unfrequently given for a single pocket handkerchief. Extravagantly expensive fans, with ruby or emerald pins, are also common."³⁷ In the display of jewelry, according to the French Baron M. de Trobriand, "American ladies rival the sumptuousness of the titled dames of Europe."³⁸ Numerous shops existed to cater to the whims of the wealthy. Broadway was the center for fashionable stores; it was on that thoroughfare that Tiffany's and Stewart's great

emporiums were located.³⁹

European styles were consciously imitated not only in women's attire but also in nearly all aspects of society life. As the wealthy social lioness Mrs. Tiffany says in Anna Mowatt's play Fashion, a delightful social satire of the mid-forties: "You have yet to learn, Mr. Snobson, that the American ee-light--the aristocracy--the how-ton--as a matter of conscience, scrupulously follow the foreign fashions."⁴⁰ American taste relied heavily on the prevailing English modes. But in the decade before the Civil War French fashions became more influential. "The taste of America," wrote the novelist Anthony Trollope in 1862, "is becoming French in its conversation, French in its comforts and French in its discomforts, French in its eating, and French in its dress, French in its manners, and will become French in its art."⁴¹

Even more than in the 1830's, New York fashionables doted on nobility. Their reception of the Prince of Wales was a good example of this. Not only did aspiring Americans cultivate the acquaintance of princes, dukes, and barons, but also a number of marriages between wealthy daughters of American plutocrats and European noblemen took place. One of the most famous of these marriages occurred on October 13, 1859, when Miss Frances Amelia Bartlett, daughter of wealthy New York parents, married a Spanish noble, Don Estaban Santa Cruz de Oviedo at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Described as "the Diamond Wedding," it highlighted New York's social season. The bridegroom, in addition to being titled, was a very wealthy Cuban, owning several large plantations. Many dignitaries were present. The wedding presents alone were said to be valued at anywhere from \$50 to \$100 thousand, including a great string of diamonds from Tiffany's.⁴²

For those unable to marry into nobility there was always the hope of searching back into one's genealogy and turning up a stray duke. On Broadway there existed an office of heraldry where, for a fee, the socially ambitious and pecuniarily prosperous would be informed of their noble lineage.⁴³ In the early fifties, according to Nathaniel Willis, a tome entitled an American Hand Book of Heraldry was published by Gwilt Mapleson, containing the pedigrees and coats-of-arms of some of New York's leading families, along with "directions for crests, mottoes and liveries." Included in the book were pictures of the family crests of such families as the Allens, Christies, Doanes, Emburys, Grays, Grymes, Haggertys, Hones, Livingstons, McVickars, Mounts, Porters, Schermerhorns, Taylors, and Wards. This book reportedly sold "like hot cakes" among the pretentious aristocrats of New York.⁴⁴

Social affairs among New York fashionables in the Jacksonian period, although quite exclusive, were neither too costly nor frequent to be beyond the means of the average middle-class New Yorker. A decade later this was not the

case. As in the earlier period social life consisted chiefly of exclusive balls, dinners, and parties. But both in frequency and lavishness the affairs of the forties and fifties far surpassed those of the thirties. An entry in Strong's Diary for November 30, 1848, gives an idea of the full social schedule followed by upper class New Yorkers: "Divers parties in prospect. . . . One at that amiable Mrs. Baxter's tomorrow night that I shall shirk, one at Mrs. Fearing's and one at Abraham Schermerhorn's. The Penningtons give a fancy ball at Newark next week" (I, 336).

The tone that High Society was to adopt was clearly indicated as early as 1840. In that year several balls were staged the likes of which had not been seen before in this country. The most elaborate was the Brevoort Costume ball given on February 27, at the Brevoort mansion on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Ninth Street. "Never before," according to Philip Hone, "has New York witnessed a fancy ball so splendidly gotten up, in better taste, or more successfully carried through."⁴⁵ According to the New York Herald, the first paper to perfect the art of society-page coverage, nearly six-hundred of the "élite of this country were there." People came as Hamlets, Othellos, Romeos, Caesars, Sultans, Queen Victoria and sundry other personages. One dress, the Herald reported, cost over \$2,500. The ball lasted from eight in the evening to five the next morning. Servants, and excellent food and wines were found in abundance. The

Herald devoted its entire first page to the affair, describing it in characteristically over-exuberant terms as having "created a greater sensation in the fashionable world than any thing of the kind since the creation of the world, or the fall of beauteous woman, or the frolic of old Noah, after he left the ark and took to wine and drinking."⁴⁶

From the time of the Brevoort Ball in 1840 up to the reception for the Prince of Wales in 1860, fashionable soirees yearly became more extravagant and elaborate. By 1850 it was not unusual for \$3,000 or \$4,000 to be spent on a single party.⁴⁷ A contemporary satirized the extremes to which those in society went to outdo one another: "If Mrs. A. had a thousand dollars worth of flowers in her rooms, Mrs. B. will strain every nerve to have twice or three times as many, though all the greenhouses within 10 miles of the city must be stripped to obtain them. If Mrs. C. bought all the game in market for her supper, Mrs. D.'s anxiety is to send to the prairies for her's,--and so on in other matters. Mrs. E. had the prima donna to sing at her soirée, and Mrs. F. at once engages the whole opera troupe."⁴⁸

The Episcopal Church continued to be the church of the aristocracy. An indication of this was the fact that the unofficial ruler of New York's High Society was Isaac H. Brown, the famed sexton of Grace Church. In 1846 the congregation of Grace Church moved from its downtown location on Rector Street to the beautiful marble structure designed

by James Renwick on Broadway at Tenth Street. This new site, central to the recherché uptown residences, made Grace more than ever the most fashionable church in New York. Thousands of dollars were paid for the yearly rent of a single pew.⁴⁹ Brown stood at the entry way to the best society. He knew the antecedents and the fortunes of all the leading families in the city. It was to Brown that persons of social standing entrusted the invitations for any important occasion. As a contemporary noted: "He gets up parties, engineers bridals, and conducts funerals, more genteely than any other man."⁵⁰ Another writer called Brown "a kind of master of ceremonies and general referee in aristocratic society."⁵¹

In addition to the rounds of balls and parties, New York's elite frequented certain theatres and the opera. The latter was particularly fashionable, and opera companies were patronized almost exclusively by High Society. In 1847 the Astor Place Opera Theatre opened. "Never perhaps," wrote the New Yorker Charles Haswell, "was any theatre built that afforded a better opportunity for the display of dress."⁵² When a new Italian opera company opened on November 2, 1849, the Tribune reported that the "elite of New York aristocracy" were present, "about a thousand of the most brilliantly-dressed and expensively-bred ladies and gentlemen in New York. . . ."⁵³ As with Grace Church persons spent thousands for choice season seats. "The Italian Opera," wrote a journalist in the early fifties, "has become one of the

established and most conspicuous of our glorious institutions, and not to be familiar with its organization, its characteristics, its beauties and general atmosphere, marks one as very low down in the scale of refinement, elegance and social distinction."⁵⁴

III

Palatial mansions, lavish furnishing, collections of European art, grand hotels, regal equipages, fine horses, real or feigned titles, costly parties and various other forms of conspicuous display were indicative of a class of persons attempting to assert their superiority in an ostensibly democratic society. Well before Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner through their title "The Gilded Age" coined the most lasting epithet describing post-Civil War business civilization, New York had a "gilded" society. An Englishman remarked in the late fifties: "There is perhaps, more of what is called 'living for appearances' in New York than in any other American city. . . . The tasteless ostentation of vulgar wealth is by no means wanting. . . ." ⁵⁵ "We live on the sidewalks;" wrote a New Yorker, "we dine, dress, talk, and make society in public; we marry for money and live for appearance. . . ." ⁵⁶

Some persons lamented that the ostentatious spectacle of lavish spending in the forties and fifties had ended true aristocracy in New York. The Episcopalian Bishop William Kip complained that the growing facilities for

making fortunes had ushered in "the age of gaudy wealth."
"Wealth came in and created social distinction which took
the place of family, and thus society became vulgarized."⁵⁷

Great wealth was a factor in society which a person
like the reminiscing Bishop Kip did not fully understand.
It did, as he fretted, create garishness and vulgarity, but
enjoying luxurious goods and services was not the chief
reason persons sought to accumulate large fortunes. These
were secondary concerns. Of primary importance was the fact
that wealth conferred both power and honor on its possessors.⁵⁸
Even the old Knickerbocker families whom Kip seemingly saw
as the true aristocracy generally followed the pattern of the
parvenu in the forties and fifties. Thus, the numerous man-
sions of Fifth Avenue were built not only by the nouveau riche
but also by such respectable old families as the Brevoorts,
Rhinelanders, Howlands, Grinnells, Griswolds, Lenoxes, Lor-
illards, and others.⁵⁹

Power and distinction, two of the most important
attributes of aristocracy, were substantially augmented by
the great increase in fortunes. The real change which did
take place between the thirties and the mid-forties and
fifties was the growth of "High Society"--a society-page
class partially dependent on conspicuous consumption to gain
social notoriety.⁶⁰ The way of life of this wealthy society-
page set distinguished them from the rest of society far
more pronouncedly than did the less ostentatious life of

the earlier Knickerbocker elite.

It was in this period of lavish spending that the term the "Upper Ten Thousand" came into vogue when referring to New York's best society. The phrase was originated by Nathaniel Willis in the magazine of New York society, the Home Journal.⁶¹ In 1852, Charles Astor Bristed, the grandson of John Jacob Astor and the husband of Henry Brevoort's daughter, published a book entitled The Upper Ten Thousand, sketching New York society life. In the London edition of this work Bristed felt compelled to explain that America was not "wild savage, and frightful." He wrote:

You will be surprised when, in presenting you in American society, I introduce you among a set of exquisites,--daintily-arrayed men, who spend half their income on their persons, and shrink from the touch of a woollen glove,--who are curious in wines and liquors, and would order dinner against the oldest frequenter of the Trois Frères; delicate and lovely women, who wear the finest furs and roll in the most stylish equipages,--who are well up in the latest French dances and the newest French millinery,--who talk much such English as you do yourself, and three or four continental languages into the bargain.⁶²

As the term "Upper Ten Thousand" implies no small set dominated New York's High Society, although there were a number of restricted coteries. "No society in the world," claimed the New York journalist Junius Browne, "has more divisions and subdivisions than ours--more ramifications and inter-ramifications,--more circles within circles--more segments and parts of segments."⁶³ Browne, in a book on New York life, maintained that there were three basic

divisions among the aristocracy--the Knickerbockers, the newly rich, and social adventurers.⁶⁴ These categories have some merit, but are much too clear-cut. Although family, education, and manners continued to be important as a basis for high social standing, the common denominator of New York's elite was wealth. Without wealth even the oldest families tended to sink into social obscurity; with it one sooner or later acquired enough of the trappings of education, culture, and manners to become respectable.

That wealth gave one status was basic to the American dream. It was this factor that gave men the incentive to amass fortunes well beyond their actual needs. Americans generally were proud of the speed with which they could accomplish anything; this included the development of an aristocracy. "An Englishman," according to Nathaniel Willis, "must have a grandfather, to be a gentleman, while an American needs but a father."⁶⁵ Some individuals did not even need fathers as the careers of such persons as John Jacob Astor, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Ezra Cornell, Alexander Stewart, and a host of others indicate.

Etiquette books of the time were designed to transform persons of wealth into ladies and gentlemen. As the wellborn authoress, Catherine M. Sedgwick, wrote: "I have seen it gravely stated by some writers on manners that 'it takes three generations to make a gentleman.' This is too slow a process in these days of accelerated movement. . . .

You have it in your power to fit yourselves by cultivation of your minds and the refinement of your manners for intercourse, on equal terms, with the best society in our land."⁶⁶

Numerous books on etiquette were written during the period from 1830 to 1860. Arthur Schlesinger records the publication of 28 books on social decorum in the thirties, 36 in the forties, and 38 in the fifties.⁶⁷

The great majority of these etiquette books not only aimed at teaching manners, but also at instilling class distinctions and appealing to social snobbery. The popularity of the Earl of Chesterfield's maxims on behavior is a good example. Lord Chesterfield's work with its chivalric ethic of courtly self-gratification went through many American editions. The American Chesterfield, a condensed manual with what American editors considered improprieties expurgated, became the most popular etiquette book in this country, teaching a highly aristocratic moral code.⁶⁸ American writers on manners, although usually more moralistic than the English Earl, also assumed and encouraged a class structured society. Mrs. James Parton (known to her readers as Fanny Fern) gave such advice in her "Rules for Ladies" as: "Always keep callers waiting, till they have had time to notice the outlay of money in your parlors;" or "Always whisper and laugh at concerts, by way of compliment to the performers, and to show your neighbors a sovereign contempt for their comfort." In addition to etiquette books, the

fashionable magazines such as Godey's Lady's Book and the Home Journal were filled with both didactic essays on breeding and ill-breeding as well as sentimental stories depicting heroes and heroines of great gentility and servants who knew their place and served happily.⁶⁹

Men having by one means or another acquired a fortune set themselves up, one after another, in an elegant manner and attempted to enter society. Often the rich nabob was snubbed by those who had already arrived. The desire to obtain an exclusive niche in High Society made that society quite competitive and cutthroat. According to Willis, persons in society were "afraid to give a party, lest somebody should 'vote it vulgar'--afraid to have an acquaintance who is not intimate at the So-and-so's--afraid to take seats at the Operas lest the fashionables should not be on that side of the house--afraid to decide where they will go for summer, till they know what is 'the thing'--afraid to have a card printed, answer a note, ask a stranger to dinner, or reply to a civility, lest they should show that they have not been to Europe, or do something which would number them with the last people they heard ridiculed."⁷⁰

Naturally a society based primarily on wealth fluctuated with the rise and fall of fortunes. There were individuals with some means or some credit who would live pretentiously for as long as their money, credit, or wits would allow. Such persons often blazed resplendently across the

social scene only to burn out and disappear.⁷¹ One such individual was Dr. Samuel "Sarsaparilla" Townsend who had made a small fortune from that beverage. In the late fifties, Townsend built the largest mansion in the city on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-Fourth Street occupying three lots. According to a contemporary Townsend's palace was "large enough for a hotel, and showy enough for a prince. It was burnished with gold and silver, and elaborately ornamented with costly painting."⁷² This mansion was the nine days' wonder of the city. Men and women crowded to see it at twenty-five cents a head. But in less than three years Townsend went bankrupt and the house passed out of his hands. Eventually A. T. Stewart bought the property, razed the dwelling, and just after the Civil War built a million dollar white marble mansion which then was the most splendid in America.⁷³

However, the "Sarsaparilla" Townsends were the exceptions, not the rule. The great majority of New York's elite were far more permanent both in their wealth and social status. Great wealth began to tell, and by the 1850's newly rich industrial families such as the Havemeyers, Stuarts, Colgates, Coopers, Allaires, and Hoes were accepted as social equals by the Livingstons, Schuylers, Fishes, Van Cortlandts and others.⁷⁴

Marriage alliances between wealthy families were common. It has been said that Beach's Biography of Wealth

served as a marriage guide for mercenary mothers looking for a good match.⁷⁵ It was not unusual for marriages to be arranged between families. Often rich but not old family persons would actually buy brides or grooms as the case might be by offering large sums to respectable families.⁷⁶ Junius Browne termed these marriages "coldblooded calculations, determinations for vulgar display, meretricious shows from beginning to end. There is slender opportunity or desire for election in them. They are . . . managed, directed, and accomplished by and through ambitious mothers and their thoroughly disciplined daughters."⁷⁷ Despite occasional moral condemnations of this type of mercenary mating, arranged marriages between upper class families grew in frequency during the forties and fifties.⁷⁸ At the other extreme genuine love matches between persons of different class produced a general shock in society. In 1857, wrote Charles Haswell, "the public was much surprised and interested in reading the announcement of the marriage of Miss Mary Ann Baker, daughter of a very much esteemed citizen, to John Dean, her father's coachman. So distasteful was the marriage to her father that he essayed to remove her from the country, and also to have her declared a lunatic. . . ."⁷⁹

Marriage plans were often cemented, sometimes by chance and sometimes by arrangement, at the various elegant summer spas and resorts frequented by persons of fashion. Watering spots such as Saratoga Springs and Ballston Spa in

New York or Berkeley Springs and White Sulpher Springs in Virginia were developed in the late eighteenth century chiefly for the sickly. At that time the mania for useful work was so universal in America that the notion of a summer resort in which to spend leisure hours was virtually unheard of.⁸⁰ By the Jacksonian period these spas became the first theatres of conspicuous leisure in America. Still in the guise of health resorts the watering places each year attracted the elite of both North and South. In mid-Victorian America, Saratoga Springs north of Albany was the nation's most fashionable resort. "All the world is here," wrote Philip Hone from Saratoga in 1839, "politicians and dandies; cabinet ministers and ministers of the gospel; officeholders and office-seekers; humbuggers and humbugged; fortune-hunters and hunters of woodcock; anxious mothers and lovely daughters. . . ."81

During the summer of 1838, Hone was staying at the elegant United States Hotel of which he wrote: "no watering-place in this or any other country can boast of a pleasanter establishment." Present at the time that Hone wrote were President Martin Van Buren, Henry Clay, New York Governor William Seward, Edward P. Livingston, General Winfield Scott, and hundreds of other leading figures. Hone wrote that the Saratoga season united "as in one brilliant focus the talent, intelligence, and civic virtues of the various parts of the country."⁸²

Yearly resorts such as Saratoga became less self-conscious. By the mid-forties persons seldom made the excuse that they were visiting a spa for their health. In 1850 Saratoga introduced horse racing; shortly after this gambling casinos were added. But above all the spa was the great spot for matchmaking. The Baron Salomon de Rothschild visiting Saratoga in August of 1860 wrote that "every day the young girls put on new dresses in order to attract admirers. When one of them has several around her, she encourages them all until she has made a decision in favor of one of them. I was present several times as a confidant at these intrigues and it is quite diverting, I assure you."⁸³

After his stay in Saratoga, Baron Rothschild went on to Newport, Rhode Island, which by the late fifties had surpassed Saratoga Springs as the center of fashion. "All of New York society," wrote the Baron, "is gathered here. Boston, Philadelphia, and especially the South have sent a good share of theirs, too." Among the notable New Yorkers residing at Newport that summer were Hamilton Fish, F. W. Rhineland, Erastus Corning, James Lennox, Henry Van Rensselaer, William Schermerhorn, August Belmont, and Ward McAllister.⁸⁴ At Newport there were a number of luxury hotels, but many of the wealthy summer visitors built "cottages," some of which rivaled the most extravagant Fifth Avenue mansions.⁸⁵ Ward McAllister, the self-appointed leader

of High Society, termed Newport "the most enjoyable and luxurious little island in America." On one occasion McAllister decided to give his cottage ground "an animated look" for the benefit of "a gathering of the brightest and cleverest people in the country." He hired for the day an entire flock of Southdown sheep, two yoke of cattle, and several cows.⁸⁶

So general did spending summers at fashionable resorts become amongst the well-to-do that not to do so became a mark of social inferiority. Apparently some persons even went to the extreme of pretending to be out-of-town in summer when they were not. G. G. Foster satirized the fashionable summer routine:

The first week of bright sunshiny weather dismays all these persons, who pack off in hot haste to be roasted at Saratoga, or broiled and bleached at Newport, lest somebody should suspect they are not "fashionable." If, by any sad mischance, one of this class should be obliged to remain in town, he straightway bars up his front door, offers inducements to spiders to colonize the portico--while members of the household exist in the kitchen and steal out after dark through the back streets for fear some one should recognize them and report them not "fashionable."⁸⁷

In addition to visiting the summer resorts, New York's elite travelled abroad with increasing frequency in the decades before the Civil War. European travel was facilitated by the greater speed, safety, and regularity of steamships and sailing packets and by the growth of wealth and leisure. Hone noted in his Diary that at a dinner of some twenty persons in 1838 all had spent some time abroad. A few years later the diarist lamented that it was now quite

the rage for women of fashion to reside abroad for months at a time leaving their husbands in the United States.⁸⁸ By the 1850's European travel was a fashionable commonplace. On a visit to Rome, Ward McAllister found that city "full of the crème de la crème of New York society." McAllister remarked on the number of fashionable New York Women having busts done in Rome. As in the thirties Americans abroad tried to enter Europe's best society and often attacked the democratic tendencies of the United States. McAllister noted an American at a party in Florence who when asked by the Austrian minister what the decorations he wore were replied: "Sir, my country is a Republic; if it had been a Monarchy, I would have been the Duke of Pennsylvania. The Order I wear is that of The Cincinnati."⁸⁹

The way in which the life of upper class persons was distinguished from that of the lower and middle classes was not limited to the obvious things such as housing, dress, carriages, summer resorts, European travel and so on. Class differences were also reflected in many of the details of daily life. An illustration would be the use of gas lighting. As early as 1823 gas lighting had been introduced into New York City. But right up until the Civil War the cost of gas light limited its use in private homes almost exclusively to the rich. The same was true of running water and indoor toilets. These things in their own right became status symbols.⁹⁰

Although a small leisure class had developed by the fifties most men of wealth continued to work regardless of the size of their fortunes. This then gave them something in common with virtually every other American male. But for the wives and daughters of the well-to-do a way of life developed which was strikingly distinct from the American norm. "Very many things are considered unfeminine to be done," wrote Mrs. Lydia Child, "and of those duties which are feminine by universal consent, few are deemed genteel by the upper classes. It is not genteel for mothers to wash and dress their own children, or make their clothing, or teach them, or romp with them in the open air. Thus the most beautiful and blessed of all human relations performs but half its healthy and renovating mission. . . . Some human souls, finding themselves fenced within such narrow limits by false relations, seek fashionable distinction, or the excitement of gossip, flirtation, and perpetual change because they can find no other unforbidden outlets for the irrepressible activity of mind and heart."⁹¹

These wives and daughters of wealth did lead a life of leisure. They had a sufficient number of servants to take care of the ordinary domestic duties. It was tacitly assumed in upper class society that a woman did not work. Perhaps at no other time in American history was the woman so pampered as in mid-nineteenth century America. Mrs. A. J. Graves in a work on Women in America published in 1855

wrote that:

The tendency to Orientalism is visible . . . in the false position in which woman is placed, as a being formed for no higher purpose than to be decorated, admired, and valued for her personal charm. Do we not see females in every fashionable circle who fill no loftier station in social life, and who live as idly and as uselessly as the gorgeously attired inmates of the harem. . . .⁹²

An English woman, Mrs. Barbara Bodichon, wrote in 1859 that "there is in America, a large class of ladies who do absolutely nothing. . . . In America--in that noble, free, new country, it is grievous to see the old false snobbish idea of 'respectability' eating at the heart of society, making generations of women idle and corrupt, and retarding the onward progress of the great Republic."⁹³

The contrast between the leisurely life of the women of fashion and that of the majority of women who were burdened down with domestic duties or with outside employment was very great. Mrs. Bodichon noted that "there are thousands who have to do household work, bear and nurse children, cook and wash, and live continually indoors, often in badly built, undrained, unhealthy wooden houses, and suffer terribly. . . . As a pendant to this, side by side, may be seen a sister, living in the midst of luxuries, which many an English lady of rank would refuse as superfluous."⁹⁴

Not having domestic duties nor allowed to follow a profession or even a serious intellectual pursuit, aristocratic ladies gave an inordinate amount of attention to

fashion. In New York a fashionable woman set aside one morning each week as a day to receive her friends. On that given day, according to a writer in the early fifties, "you will find her enshrined in all that is grand and costly; her door guarded by servants, whose formal ushering will kill within you all hope of unaffected and kindly intercourse; her parlors glittering with all she can possibly accumulate that is recherché, . . . and her own person arrayed with all the solicitude of splendor that morning dress allows, and sometimes something more."⁹⁵

With the great growth of luxurious living the number of persons catering to the whims of wealth and fashion noticeably increased. Nathaniel Willis noted "the many ministers to taste and luxury who follow the garden of refinement on its 'Westward course'" arriving naturally in New York. Those serving the needs of aristocracy included such functionaries as portrait painters, dancing masters, upholsterers, glove fitters, gardeners, hairdressers, carriage makers, milleners, fine chefs, and various other retainers. Many foreigners, particularly French, Italian, and German, served in these special capacities.⁹⁶

The growing number of servants in New York and other cities was perhaps the clearest index of the rise of an urban aristocracy. As related in an earlier chapter, by the mid-forties the term "servant" and the wearing of livery were commonplace. Advertisements such as the following from the

New York Tribune, January 30, 1851, were frequent: "WANTED --Situations for about seventy excellent servants. . . ."

Mrs. Mowatt in her play Fashion has Zeke, the Negro servant of the pretentious Mrs. Tiffany, say of his uniform: "Dere's a coat to take de eyes ob all Broadway! Ah! Missy, it am de fixins dat make de natural born gemman. A libery for ever!"⁹⁷ Zeke had enough actual counterparts in New York of the forties and fifties to give this satire a firm basis in reality.

Complaints of bad and insufficient servants continued to be heard, but not as frequently as in the Jacksonian period. Foreigners no longer found servants so inconveniently democratic. An English woman visiting America at mid-century said: "So far as the observations and enquires of sixteen months could elicit such facts, I have not discovered that the servants in the United States are of a worse description than the same class of persons in England."⁹⁸ Evidence seems to indicate that what difficulty in obtaining good servants remained in the forties and fifties did not stem chiefly from an equalitarian dislike of service, but rather from the fact that servants were poorly paid and forced to work long hours.⁹⁹ Strong went so far as to say that slaves "are more kindly dealt with by their owners than servants are by Northern masters." Another writer observed that contempt for servants seemed to be a badge of gentility. The rich showed their superiority

by "enforcing caste in our treatments of domestics."¹⁰⁰

IV

The generation before the Civil War witnessed the emergence of a class of wealthy persons set apart quite clearly from the rest of society. This New World aristocracy was urban centered, New York City being its chief focal point. "The best society in New York," stated an English woman in 1854, "would not suffer by comparison in any way with the best society in England."¹⁰¹ Another foreigner residing in New York in the early sixties predicted that very soon the different classes in America "will be as marked, if not more so, than in the old regions of titled nobility."¹⁰²

Actually, on the eve of the Civil War there were two distinct types of aristocracy in America. In the North, centering in New York and other cities, there existed a plutocracy of merchants, mill owners, shipping magnates, and speculators in city real estate. In the South aristocracy had followed a divergent path because of quite different economic and social conditions. There a planter aristocracy controlled the best lands and the slave labor supply. Southern planter magnates had increasingly claimed to be the only true aristocrats in the country. In some respects this claim seemed valid. Like the former feudal nobility of Europe, Southern planters had large land holdings, servants and subservient workers, elegant manors, political power,

and various social privileges. However, Southern aristocracy remained dependent on the institution of slavery, and just as slavery was anachronistic in mid-nineteenth century America so too was an agrarian based aristocracy. The future lay with those who controlled the nation's industries, merchandizing facilities, and transportation systems.¹⁰³

Even before the Civil War forced the collapse of ante-bellum Southern society the triumph of the Northern industrial elite seemed clear. The Civil War strongly reinforced the power of the Northern aristocracy and gave to the Northern elite a greater degree of national political power than it had hitherto enjoyed. But it could be argued that well before the firing on Fort Sumter the Northern aristocracy was already more powerful and more firmly entrenched than that of the South.

From the point of view of wealth and style of living certainly the Northern millionaires and lesser magnates far surpassed the Southern planter. Ward McAllister, who had been born on a Georgia plantation and knew the best society of the South intimately, attacked the Southern claim that only Southern gentlemen lived well and "that there was no such thing as good society in New York or other Northern cities; that New Yorkers and Northern people were simply a lot of tradespeople, having no antecedents, springing up like the mushroom." McAllister argued that, on the contrary, no one in America lived more aristocratically than New

Yorkers. He claimed that New Yorkers dined better and had better servants than the slaveholding Southerners.¹⁰⁴

The question of the actual power wielded by the Northern elite is more difficult to ascertain. In the Jacksonian period most trades were still dominated by independent skilled workers and only in the South did aristocracy control a large labor supply. In 1830 there was not a clear economic basis for distinct class lines in the North. Only in the matter of finance was a select group able to effect any widespread control over the economy, and Jackson's attack on the Bank actually weakened this power.¹⁰⁵

However, between the thirties and the Civil War this situation was greatly altered. In the North, and particularly in New York, the wealthy classes were beginning to exercise a power and influence far greater than had ever been possessed by any earlier American elite. Private corporations were able to have great sway and control over such things as banking and the transportation system. The factory system, largely unchecked either by government or by an effectively organized labor force, gave to a few capitalists the virtual control over the destinies of many.¹⁰⁶

By the fifties unregulated industrial growth had led to the decline of the status of free labor and had created a propertyless urban population dependent on the industrial system for their very existence. At the same time the emergence of a wealthy plutocracy created far greater

extremes between rich and poor than had previously existed. The fact that many of the proletariat consisted of foreign immigrants further widened the social division between capital and labor.

Americans tolerated the stratification of what had been a fairly homogeneous, middle-class society for a number of reasons. In the first place those who were most harmfully effected by this development had the least power to do anything about it. Workers were unsuccessful in meeting the challenge of industrialization either through unions or politics. Even if they had possessed political power, which they did not, there was the added difficulty that the government of the United States was highly decentralized both by nature and choice at a time when the economy was becoming more and more centralized, controlled by the new capitalist elite. Under different circumstances politicians in the fifties and sixties might have been forced to come to grips with some of the basic social and economic problems stemming from industrialization. However, the slavery crisis, the Civil War and reconstruction absorbed political attention during these decades while the rich grew yearly richer and more powerful.¹⁰⁷

Another factor was the strong American belief in social mobility, a belief which made Americans more tolerant of plutocrats, as well as paupers, than any society in the Western world. Equality meant the ability to get ahead.

Thus, the Astors, Stewarts, Vanderbilts, Coopers, and Cornells of society were not hated for their wealth; they were heroes who had triumphantly climbed the American success ladder. It took Americans a long time to realize that the very success of these persons limited future opportunities and lessened social mobility. But as recent studies have shown the chances of rising from rags to riches became less of a reality with each passing decade.¹⁰⁸

The rich helped to make their position more acceptable by using their wealth philanthropically. Many of New York's wealthiest citizens gave away a certain percentage of their yearly incomes to favorite charities. William Colgate, the soap king, gave large sums to Hamilton Literary and Theological Seminary (Colgate University since 1890). The Stuart brothers, Robert and Alexander, owners of the nation's largest sugar refinery located in New York City, donated over \$1 million to Princeton University and several hundred thousand to Presbyterian Hospital of New York. Peter Cooper founded Cooper Union in the late fifties as a free school for the poor. Both Alexander Stewart and Horace Claflin, the drygoods princes, practiced extensive philanthropy.¹⁰⁹

Often philanthropy was highly paternalistic and did little to win friends for the wealthy. During the panic of 1854 when thousands were unemployed, New York's elite held a grand ballet at the Fourteenth Street opera house to help relieve the suffering of the poor. As George Strong wrote:

To a poverty stricken demagogue, the plan of feasting the aristocracy on boned turkey and pâté-de-foie gras that the democracy may be supplied with pork and beans, and assembling the Upper Ten in brocade and valenciennes that the lower thousand may be helped to flannel and cotton shirting, would furnish a theme most facile and fertile.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, as Strong later wrote: "There has been vast improvement during the last three or four years in the dealings of the 'upper class' with the poor; not merely in the comparative abundance of their bounty, but in the fact that it has become fashionable and creditable and not unusual for people to busy themselves in personal labors for the very poor and in personal intercourses with them."¹¹¹ For these and other reasons, then, Americans generally tolerated the major social and economic changes between 1830 and 1860 without effective protest.

V

However, the social and economic changes that brought a wealthy plutocracy to the pinnacle of New York society in the period before the Civil War were not accepted without resentment. As the rich became richer and the poor more numerous hostilities and even open class conflicts, frequently occurred, particularly in New York City. In the dreary slum-ghettos of Manhattan immigrant and native workers often expressed unrest and dissatisfaction in the form of brawls, riots, and other violent outbreaks. For example, on Friday, May 10, 1849, the fashionable Astor Place Opera House was

the scene of a bloody fracas. That night a large mob, chiefly Irish, stormed the theatre where the hated English actor William Charles Macready was playing. Shouting "burn the damn den of aristocracy," the unruly crowd attacked, throwing bricks and abuse, only to be driven back by a round of musket fire from the forewarned militia. The riot that ensued saw sides taken along class lines with the rich supporting Macready while the mob championed the American actor Edwin Forrest. Before the troops and the police could restore order some 200 persons were killed or seriously wounded.¹¹²

Angry outbursts of disraught citizens were reported intermittently for the next decade. During the depression year of 1857, New York's debased slum population seemed especially restless. An Independence Day quarrel between two rival gangs, the Dead Rabbits and the Bowery Boys, turned into a major riot. Streets were barricaded as whole sections of the city became a battle ground. Several persons were killed and many others wounded before the police, aided by vigilante groups composed of some of the leading citizens, were able to suppress the rioters. Nor was this the end. A little over a week later on July 13th, an angry mob of some 500 persons attacked the police with pistols and bricks.¹¹³ Later that same year as unemployment multiplied, working class persons on several occasions held large public demonstrations and paraded through the streets demanding

bread and work. Shops were sometimes sacked, and on November 10th an angry crowd seized control of part of City Hall. United States marines were brought in from Governor's Island and posted in front of the Custom-House and Treasury Office. Order was once more restored, but periodic violence remained common in the years immediately preceding the Civil War.¹¹⁴

However, the clearest example of major class strife in New York occurred during the war years. The Civil War hurt the laboring classes for, although unemployment was checked, the cost of living soared while wages seldom kept pace. Added to this was a growing distrust among immigrant workers, especially the Irish, that a war to free the Southern slave would bring in thousands of Negroes to take over their jobs. These discontents were brought to a head when the conscription of soldiers under the newly passed Draft Act began in New York in July of 1863. The law itself in the eyes of laborers seemed to bear out the familiar adage that this was a rich man's war and a poor man's fight since for \$300 anyone could buy a substitute and avoid the draft.

Hatreds aroused by economic distress, racial antagonism, and class bitterness were vented through burning, pillaging, and general carnage during the terrifying week of July 13, 1863. The draft riots began on Monday morning July 13th, when an angry mob broke into the registry office

on the corner of Third Avenue and Forty-sixth Street where drafting was in progress.¹¹⁵ After driving out the officials and burning the building, rioters then beat off a group of soldiers and police. Emboldened by their initial success the mob roamed the city almost at will attacking Negroes, abolitionists, public officials, and well-dressed gentlemen. Stores and houses were sacked, an orphan asylum for Negro children was burned. Fear gripped the city. Business closed down, public transportation halted, and factories ceased to operate as workers joined the swelling mob. Rich men feared for their lives and property. George Templeton Strong wrote in his diary on the evening of the second day of rioting: "At eight to Union League Club. Rumor it's to be attacked tonight. Some say there is to be great mischief tonight and that the rabble is getting the upper hand. Home at ten and sent for Dudley Field, Jr., to confer about an expected attack on his house and his father's. . . ." Two days later on July 16th Strong reported that the rioters "are in full possession of the western and eastern sides of the city, from Tenth Street upward, and of a good many districts beside. I could not walk four blocks eastward from this house this very minute without peril."¹¹⁶

The rioters numbered well over ten-thousand. Many were, as one contemporary noted, "the scum of the city"; others were, as Strong contemptuously observed, "the lowest Irish day laborers."¹¹⁷ Yet it would be a great falsification

to blame these riots simply on the poorest foreign immigrants. From first to last the rioters' ranks were swelled with respectable working class persons, many of whom were native Americans. As a recent student of immigrant life in New York City has concluded: "the draft riots were a manifestation, not of immigrant feeling, but of genuine working-class discontent, augmented by fierce racial antipathies characteristic of the war years."¹¹⁸

Order was restored only after a series of pitched battles reminiscent of the bloodiest days of the Paris Commune. All told over 1,000 persons were killed, some 8,000 wounded and more than 100 buildings destroyed before the combined efforts of the police, militia, army veterans, and private citizens could suppress the rioters.

Thus, well before the turbulent industrial disputes of the late nineteenth century, violence had come to characterize urban-industrial America, reflecting a growing class consciousness. The favored minority maintained their superior position, but did so only at the social cost of increasingly alienating the lower classes. These industrial aristocrats were not entirely at ease in their eminence. They lacked the mutual bonds between themselves and the working classes that had tied the feudal lord to his serf. Their services to society seldom seemed indispensable. Nor did they help the masses toward greater social and economic equality. The vast sums they spent in conspicuous display,

though sometimes admired by the less opulent majority, in the long run only increased the odium which the masses felt for the flashy rich. Furthermore, in republican America these aristocrats were clearly out of touch with the democratic ideals of the age.

In 1840 Tocqueville had warned that "the manufacturing aristocracy which is growing up under our eyes is one of the harshest which ever existed in the world. . . . If ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy again penetrate into the world, it may be predicted that this is the gate by which they will enter."¹¹⁹ Two decades later this prediction was realized in the state of New York. The generally democratic and agrarian society of farmers, craftsmen and merchants of the Jacksonian period had given way to a hierarchical urban-industrial society dominated by an aristocracy of wealth. Clearly the foundations for the plutocracy of the Gilded Age had been laid, and democracy itself stood challenged.

* * * * *

Americans of the Jacksonian era associated freedom and equality with their republican institutions. As a people they sensed a special destiny. "Providence," President Jackson told them, "has showered on this favored land blessings without number and has chosen you as the guardians of freedom to preserve it for the benefit of the human race."¹²⁰ To realize this prophecy all that was believed to be necessary

was for the genius of the people--the majority--to express itself through this nation's democratic institutions. Monarchy, oligarchy, or any form of special privilege were to be avoided.

Economic rewards were to go to the honest toiler. "The planter, the farmer, the mechanic, and the laborer," asserted Jackson in his Farewell Address, "all know that their success depends upon their own industry and economy and that they must not expect to become suddenly rich by the fruits of their toil." "Let us," proclaimed a supporter of Old Hickory, "avoid luxury as the greatest bane to liberty."¹²¹ These were the ideals of exuberant and optimistic young America.

Yet within a decade after Jackson retired from the political scene, this democratic faith stood distinctly challenged in the state of New York. In the years before the Civil War special privilege became a far more pronounced facet of New York society than in the days of Jackson's struggle to end such exclusive rights through his war on the Bank. Honest toil in the Jacksonian sense, though still rewarding the patient person with modest ambitions, had decidedly not proved to be the way to wealth, power, and recognition. Above all, luxury, "the greatest bane to liberty," had become a salient feature of life in the Empire State.

Clearly, the vague notion that the anti-democratic ills effecting American society in the late nineteenth century

were the result of the Civil War and post-war industrialization is highly questionable. All of the problems associated with that later period had already inflicted New York society in the putatively piping times of mid-nineteenth century America.

FOOTNOTES

¹Allan Nevins and Milton H. Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong (4 vols., New York, 1952), III, 9-14.

²Sigmund Diamond, ed., A Casual View of America: The Home Letters of Salomon de Rothschild (Stanford, Cal., 1961), pp. 36-42.

³Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 1-2, 4, 31-33.

⁴Ibid., III, 32; Charles H. Haswell, Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York (New York, 1896), pp. 526-30.

⁵Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 39, 40, 42-45.

⁶Diamond, ed., A Casual View of America, pp. 78-79.

⁷New York Times, September 10, 1860; Ward McAllister, Society As I Have Found It (New York, 1890), p. 129; Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 32.

⁸New York Times, October 13, 14, 1860.

⁹Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 46-49; New York Herald, October 13, 15, 1860.

¹⁰Diamond, ed., A Casual View of America, pp. 79-80.

¹¹New York Herald, October 12, 13, 15, 1860; McAllister, Society As I Have Found It, pp. 130-33.

¹²Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 52.

¹³Ibid., II, 37-38.

¹⁴Fifteen Minutes Around New York (New York, 1853), p. 19.

¹⁵The Potiphar Papers (New York, 1854), pp. 1-2; Carl Bode, Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861 (Berkeley, 1959), pp. 216-17.

¹⁶Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, I, 294.

¹⁷White, Red, and Black: Sketches of American Society in the United States During the Visit of Their Guests (2 vols., London, 1853), I, 71.

¹⁸N. Parker Willis, The Rag-Bag (New York, 1855), p. 221.

¹⁹Henry Collins Brown, Fifth Avenue--Old and New (New York, 1924), pp. 24-43; Junius H. Browne, The Great Metropolis (Hartford, 1869), pp. 221-22.

²⁰Henry Collins Brown, Brownstone Fronts and Saratoga Trunks (New York, 1935), p. 59.

²¹Arthur Train, Jr., The Story of Everyday Things (New York, 1941), pp. 268-70.

²²Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, I, 272-73.

²³Willis, The Rag-Bag, pp. 268-69.

²⁴Brown, Fifth Avenue, pp. 30-31.

²⁵Ibid.; Willis, Rag-Bag, pp. 114-15; William Hancock, An Emmigrant's Five Years in the Free States of America (London, 1860), pp. 68-69.

²⁶Haswell, Reminiscences, p. 481.

²⁷Quoted in Bayard Still, ed., Mirror For Gotham (New York, 1956), p. 126.

²⁸Putnam's Monthly, I (May, 1853), 509-10.

²⁹Quoted in I. N. Phelps Stokes, New York Past and Present (New York, 1939), p. 46.

³⁰Brown, Fifth Avenue, pp. 55-59.

³¹Abram C. Dayton, Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York (New York, 1897), pp. 139-45; Brown, Fifth Avenue, 42-43.

³²Charles Mackay, Life and Liberty in America (New York, 1859), p. 20; Willis, Rag-Bag, pp. 150-51; Putnam's Monthly, I (February, 1853), 170; Hancock, An Emigrant's Five Years in the Free States, p. 41.

³³Browne, The Great Metropolis, p. 124.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 568-73.

³⁵Mrs. C. M. Kirkland, The Evening Book (New York, 1851), pp. 48-49.

³⁶Quoted in Still, ed., Mirror For Gotham, p. 134.

³⁷Ibid., p. 142.

³⁸Cited in Willis, Rag-Bag, p. 41.

³⁹Mackay, Life and Liberty, p. 15; Pulszky, White, Red, and Black, I, 66.

⁴⁰Fashion; or Life in New York (New York, 1849), p. 31.

⁴¹North America (New York, 1951 ed.), p. 204; Kirkland, The Evening Book, pp. 109-10.

⁴²Details of the wedding are given in The New York Herald, October 14, 1859.

⁴³Browne, The Great Metropolis, p. 596.

⁴⁴Willis, Rag-Bag, pp. 49-56.

⁴⁵Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone (New York, 1936), pp. 462-63, 465.

⁴⁶New York Herald, February 10, 13, 14, March 2, 1840.

⁴⁷Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, II, 3; New York Daily Tribune, January 18, 1850.

⁴⁸Kirkland, The Evening Book, p. 44.

⁴⁹Haswell, Reminiscences, pp. 426-27.

⁵⁰Matthew H. Smith, Sunshine and Shadow in New York (Hartford, 1868), pp. 38-39; Browne, The Great Metropolis, pp. 521-22.

⁵¹Hancock, An Emigrant's Five Years in the Free States, pp. 109-10.

⁵²Reminiscences, p. 439.

⁵³New York Daily Tribune, November 3, 1849.

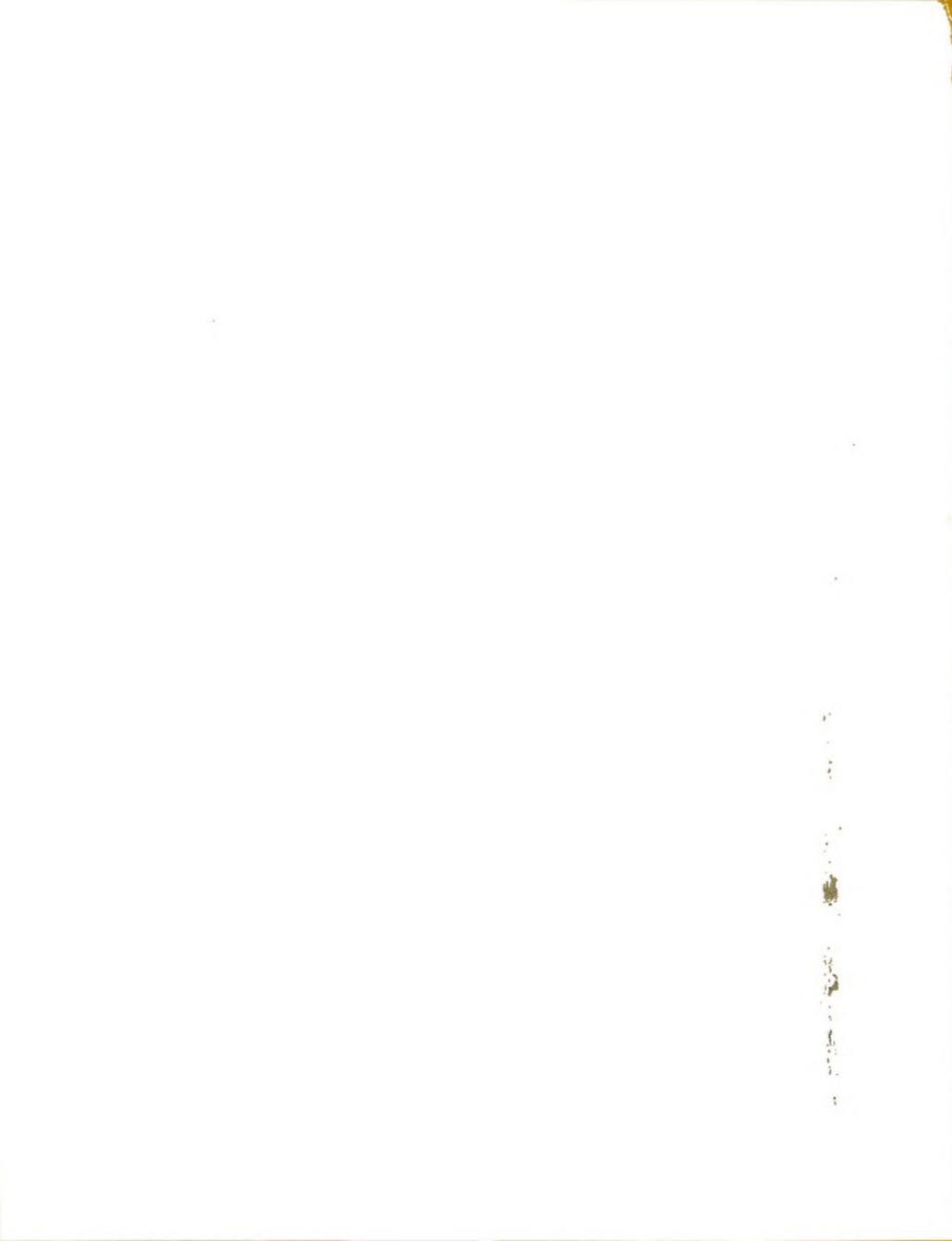
⁵⁴Foster, Fifteen Minutes Around New York, p. 71; see also: Willis, Rag-Bag, pp. 89-90; Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, I, 332.

⁵⁵Hancock, An Emigrant's Five Years in the Free States, pp. 85-86.

⁵⁶Foster, Fifteen Minutes Around New York, p. 23.

⁵⁷Kip, "New York Society in the Olden Time," Putnam's Magazine, VI (September, 1870), 252-54.

⁵⁸William Gouge, a contemporary writer on wealth, wrote: "Wi most men the desire of great wealth appears



subordinate to the love of great power and distinction. This is the end, that the means." Quoted in: Joseph L. Blau, ed., Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy (New York, 1954), p. 191.

⁵⁹Brown, Fifth Avenue, pp. 22-92.

⁶⁰Edwin H. Cady, The Gentleman in America (Syracuse, 1949), pp. 18-19, 146.

⁶¹Willis, Rag-Bag, pp. 256-57.

⁶²The Upper Ten Thousand: Sketches of American Society (New York, 1852), pp. 5-6.

⁶³The Great Metropolis, p. 32.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 32-37.

⁶⁵Rag-Bag, p. 275.

⁶⁶Means and Ends (Boston, 1839), pp. 15-16, 150.

⁶⁷Learning How to Behave (New York, 1946), p. 18.

⁶⁸Lord Chesterfield, The American Chesterfield (Philadelphia, 1833); Schlesinger, Learning How to Behave, pp. 12-14.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 17-18; Dixon Wecter, The Saga of American Society (New York, 1937), pp. 157-95.

⁷⁰Rag-Bag, pp. 80-81.

⁷¹Browne, The Great Metropolis, pp. 36-37.

⁷²Smith, Sunshine and Shadow, pp. 60-62.

- ⁷³Ibid.,; Brown, Fifth Avenue, pp. 78-79.
- ⁷⁴Alexander C. Flick, ed., History of the State of New York (10 vols., New York, 1933-37), VI, 240-41.
- ⁷⁵William Miller, "The Realm of Wealth" in John Higham, ed., The Reconstruction of American History (New York, 1962), p. 138.
- ⁷⁶Smith, Sunshine and Shadow, pp. 76-77.
- ⁷⁷The Great Metropolis, p. 517.
- ⁷⁸Arthur W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family (2 vols., New York, 1960 ed.), II, 29, 221.
- ⁷⁹Reminiscences, p. 514.
- ⁸⁰John A. Krout and Dixon R. Fox, The Completion of Independence, 1790-1830 (New York, 1944), pp. 30-31.
- ⁸¹Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone, p. 415.
- ⁸²Ibid., pp. 405-14.
- ⁸³Diamond, ed., A Casual View of America, p. 66.
- ⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 67-69.
- ⁸⁵Trollope, North America, pp. 23-29.
- ⁸⁶McAllister, Society As I Have Found It, pp. 110-19.
- ⁸⁷Celio: or, New York Above-Ground and Under-Ground (New York, 1850), p. 41.
- ⁸⁸Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone, pp. 372, 674.

⁸⁹Society As I Have Found It, pp. 48-50.

⁹⁰Charles King, Progress of the City of New-York During the Last Fifty Years (New York, 1852), pp. 47-51; Carl R. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York, 1927), p. 331.

⁹¹Letters From New York: Second Series (New York, 1845), pp. 280-81.

⁹²Quoted in Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family, II, 227-28.

⁹³Quoted in ibid., pp. 228-29.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Kirkland, The Evening Book, pp. 41-42; Pulszky, White, Red, and Black, I, 66-67; Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family, II, 231-34.

⁹⁶Willis, Rag-Bag, pp. 45-48; Robert Ernst, Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863 (New York, 1949), p. 70.

⁹⁷Fashion, p. 1.

⁹⁸Quoted in Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family, II, 148.

⁹⁹Ibid., II, 147-48, 233; Ernst, Immigrant Life, p. 67.

¹⁰⁰Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, II, 22; Kirkland, The Evening Book, pp. 159-64, 166, 168.

- ¹⁰¹Quoted in Still, ed., Mirror For Gotham, p. 158.
- ¹⁰²James D. Burn, Three Years Among the Working-Classes in The United States During the War (London, 1865), p. 21.
- ¹⁰³Wecter, The Saga of American Society, pp. 103-04; W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York, 1941), pp. 3-12, 61-81.
- ¹⁰⁴Society As I Have Found It, pp. 98-100.
- ¹⁰⁵Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, p. 20.
- ¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 328.
- ¹⁰⁷Gilman Ostrander, The Rights of Man in America, 1606-1861 (Columbia, Mo., 1960), pp. 294-302.
- ¹⁰⁸See: William Miller, ed., Men in Business: Essays in the of Entrepreneurship (Cambridge, Mass., 1953); Thomas C. Cochran, Railroad Leaders, 1845-1890 (Cambridge, Mass., 1953).
- ¹⁰⁹Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, VI, 241; Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols., New York, 1928-44), IV, 299, XVIII, 176-77, IV, 409-10, XVIII, 3-5, IV, 110; Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (New York, 1956), pp. 31-45.
- ¹¹⁰Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, II, 203-04.

¹¹¹Ibid., II, 209.

¹¹²Ibid., I, 351-53; Stokes, New York Past and Present, p. 80; Wecter, The Saga of American Society, pp. 462-63.

¹¹³Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, II, 346-50.

¹¹⁴Ibid., II, 369-71, 373; Stokes, New York Past and Present, p. 80; Ernst, Immigrant Life, pp. 106-07.

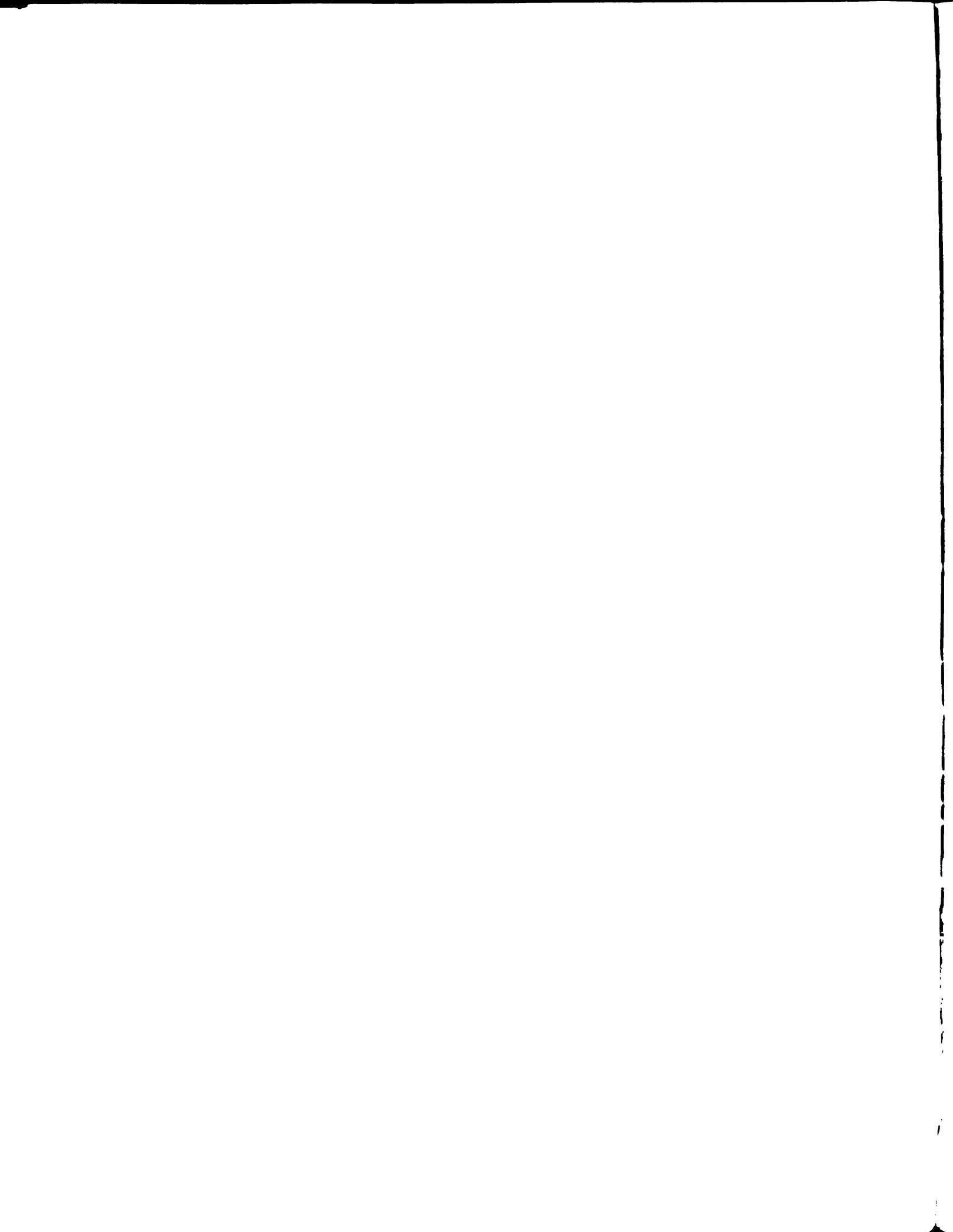
¹¹⁵The account of the draft riots has been drawn from the following sources: Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 332-43; James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the End of the Roosevelt Administration (9 vols., New York, 1928), IV, 320-28; Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers, eds., Tragic Years, 1860-1865 (2 vols., New York, 1960), II, 679-83; Ernst, Immigrant Life, pp. 172-74; Anna E. Dickinson, What Answer? (Boston, 1868), pp. 243-57.

¹¹⁶Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 338, 341.

¹¹⁷Dickinson, What Answer?, pp. 243-44; Nevins and Thomas, eds., The Diary of George Templeton Strong, III, 335.

¹¹⁸Ernst, Immigrant Life, p. 174.

¹¹⁹Democracy in America, ed. Richard D. Heffner (New York, 1956), p. 220.



¹²⁰Quoted in Joseph L. Blau, ed., Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy (New York, 1954), p. 20.

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 17, 61.

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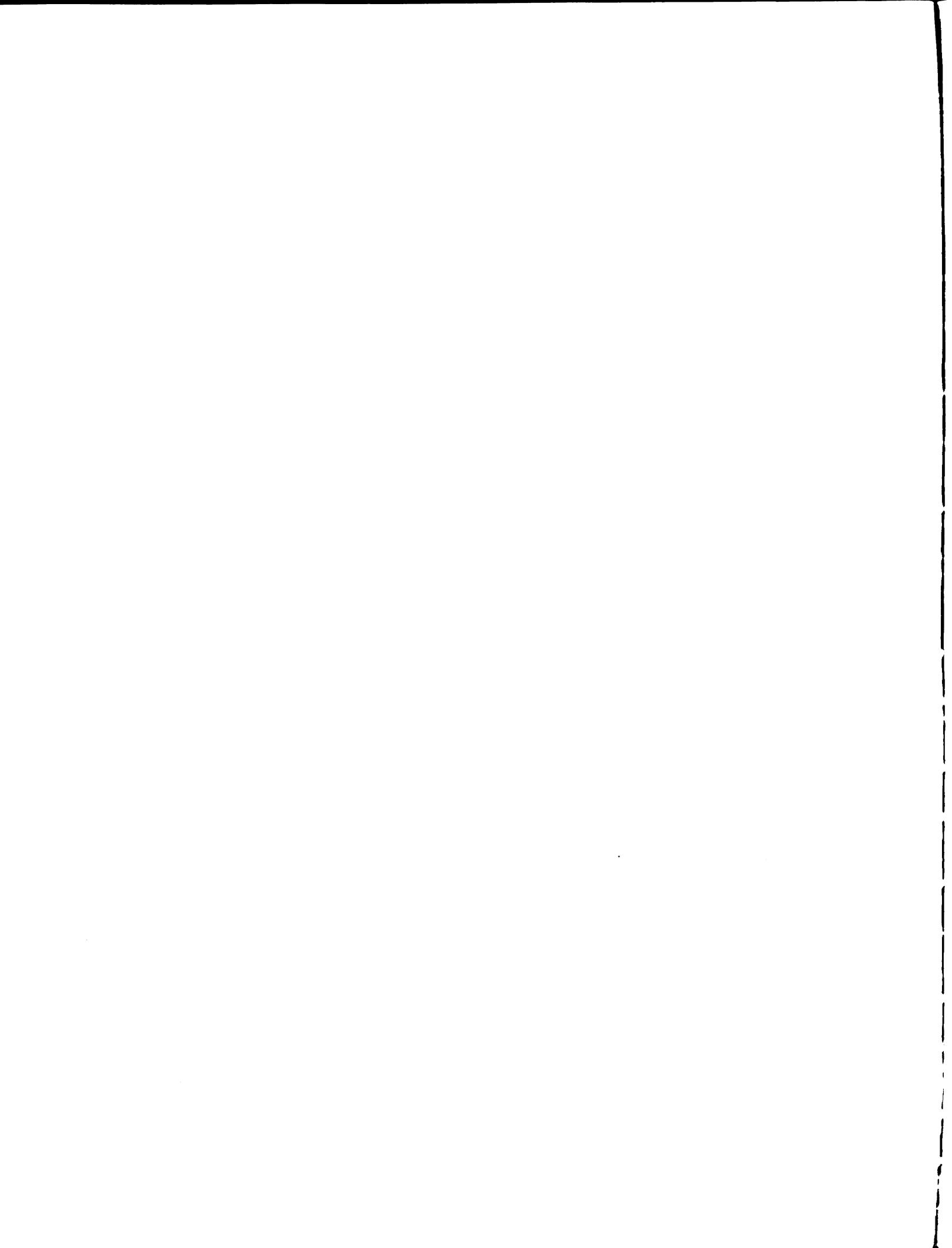
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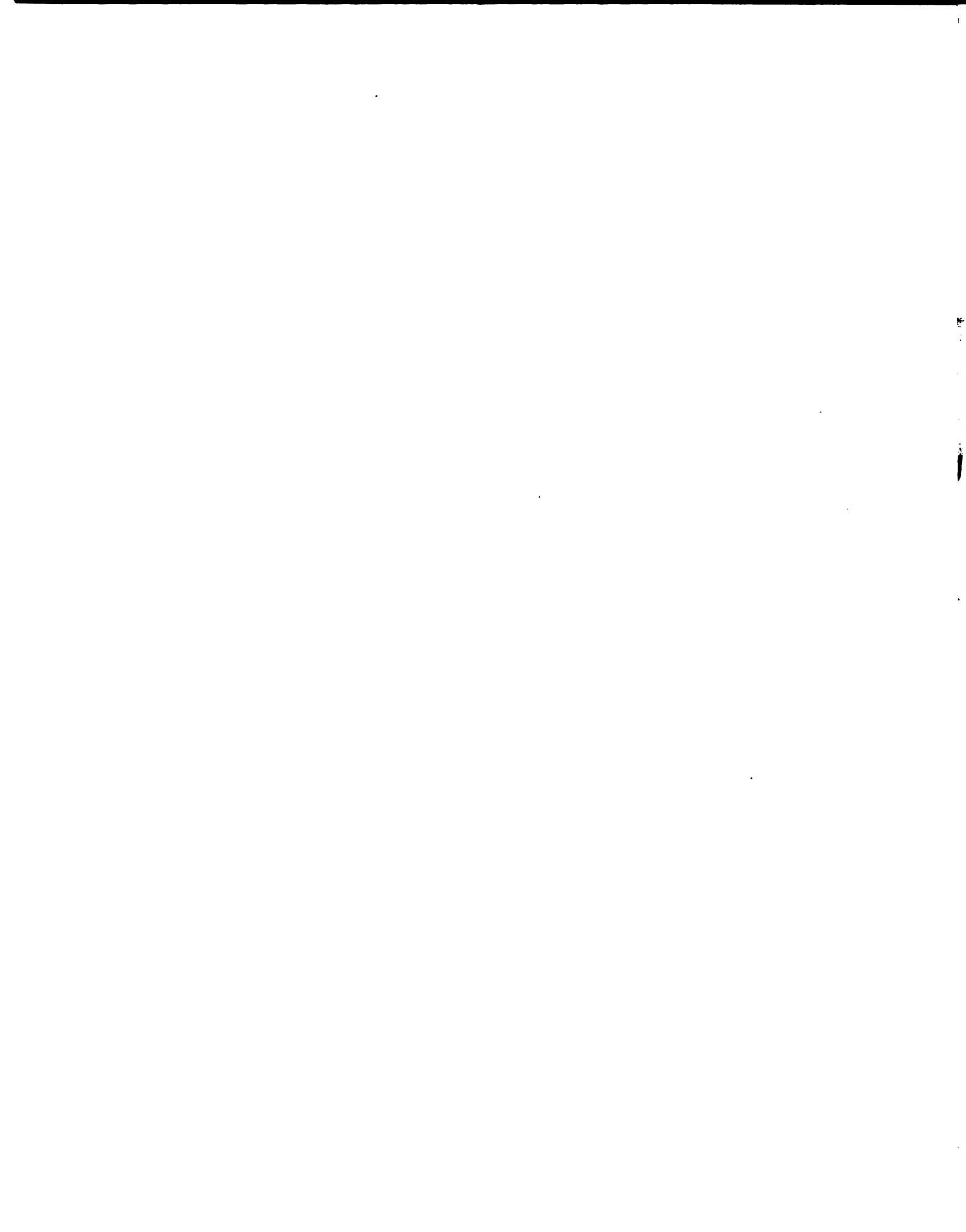
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