1937

Interpretation of the Social Tendencies Found in Arnold Bennett

Agnes Laye Babcock

Loyola University Chicago

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INTERPRETATION OF THE SOCIAL TENDENCIES
FOUND IN ARNOLD BENNETT

BY

AGNES LAYE BABCOCK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Loyola University 1937
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CHAPTER I
ARNOLD BENNETT: A BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY WITH SPECIAL STRESS ON HIS SOJOURN IN THE FIVE TOWNS

Arnold Bennett, the journalist, the novelist, the neer-do-well playwright, was a product of the grim Pottery region which he brought to life in his creation of the Five Towns novels. It was in the Five Towns that he acquired a meager knowledge of life, coolly observing and unconsciously assimilating the very spirit of the later part of the Victorian era of industrial England.

The Potteries and the mines flourished, therefore . . . . the towns suffered smoke, filth, brutality, restraint. And in the midst of this sat the middle class, the employers, the fortunate ones, calm, temperate, decent, hard-working and frugal -- above all frugal. To this class Mr. Bennett belonged, and he has given it immortality.

Bennett, the youth, wondered at the important geographic position of the Five Towns relative to its manufacturing of crockery, he questioned the importation of clay from Cornwall, in the South, to supply the crockery kilns, and he was conscious of the importance of Bursley in its activity of steam printing. Nor was he insensible to the forces directing the lives of its prejudiced inhabitants. They molded the crockery for the Five Towns and elsewhere, and in turn their characters were molded by the very environment.

ment of the Potteries. He was a part of this panorama, and it captured the imagination of young Bennett.

The Five Towns Bennett saw from the point of view of a solicitor's son and clerk, who received such scant education as the district could give. . . . Shopkeepers and manufacturers were clear-headed, shrewd and outwardly honest, though they drove sharp bargains and could condone a thief provided the money stolen was not expended on books or pictures or pleasures but was properly used for getting a start in the world of business. Close-fisted, the men became misers at the age of fifty. Their families they ruled with rods of iron, embracing obedience, order and rigid discipline. Success was measured by the fortune a man accumulated. "Money'll do owt" was a proverb of the Five Towns. This early environment accounts for those aspects of Bennett's literary career that stand out prominently. The order and discipline taught him in childhood as a means of saving time and money were never to depart from him.¹

Years later Bennett, the novelist, like his characters Sophia and Clayhanger who never threw off the influence of the Five Towns, wrote in the first paragraph of Clayhanger.

And now, people are inquiring why the Five Towns, with a railway system special to itself, is characterised by a perhaps excessive provincialism. These interesting details have everything to do with the history of Edwin Clayhanger (this statement savor strong of autobiography) as they had everything to do with the history of each of the two thousand souls in the Five Towns. Oldcastle guessed not the vast influence of its sublime stupidity.²

And yet Oldcastle, the Tory borough, was the center of education for all the provincial Five Towns.

Bennett, the novelist, seems to have portrayed Bennett, the young, in

2. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger (New York: George Hl Doran Co.), p. 2
his description of young Edwin Clayhanger on his last day of school, thinking of

... the puzzling world and the advance guard of its problems bearing down on him, slim, gawky, untidy, fair, with his worn black-braided clothes, and slung over his shoulders in a bursting satchel the last load of his school books and on his bright, rough hair a shapeless cap whose lining protruded behind, he had the extraordinary wistful look of innocence and simplicity which marks most boys of sixteen.¹

It was in the Five Towns that he placed the setting for two-thirds of his novels. By his power of minute observation and mastery of narrative, he depicts a vivid picture of the homely inhabitants in their common-place backgrounds reflecting the social tendencies of the Five Towns. At times his observation was based upon friendly sympathy, at times it was the objective perspective of an ironic journalist expressing through his characters, something of his own personality. What Hardy did for Wessex, Bennett has done for the Five Towns and what Sinclair Lewis did for Main Street, Bennett has done for the Smoky Potteries. At times he champions the weak and the poor against the powerful and the rich, noting that nobility of character can be found in the common-place of life. In his cynical journalistic fashion he points out injustices, but refrains from preaching a moral, and he calls attention to the passing of nineteenth century customs and principles for twentieth century innovations.

As Henry James remarked of Balzac, the man of business is doubled with the artist. The Five Towns, now as well known in English fiction as Trollope's Barsetshire, were in Bennett's youth five distinctive boroughs lying close together in the upper valley of the Trent in Staffordshire. The novelist renamed these Turnhill, Bursley, Hanbridge, Knype and Longshaw.

¹ Ibid., p.3
They were the center of a great industrial district for centuries known as the Potteries, where earthenware is produced in immense quantities in the midst of coal mining and iron smelting. By day the atmosphere is as black as the mud under one's feet, while at night the Works along the valley, when seen from above by the glare of furnaces through the overhanging smoke, assume fantastic shapes, resembling, it has been said, the architecture of hell. On moonless nights it was for Bennett a romantic scene as they lay stretched out before him oceans of burning iron-stone a vast tremulous carpet of flame woven in red, purple and strange greens.

As Balzac selected his native France in providing material for Comedie Humaine and as Dickens and Galsworthy selected their native England for settings in their great works, Bennett selects his native Five Towns as the stage to dramatize their social tendencies as he saw them in his youth, as he recalled them when he was a successful journalist and later when he became a famous novelist.

Among all industries, that of the "potteries" is one of the most cheerless because of the total absence of that romantic setting, whether fiery or grimly dark, which constitutes the poetry of iron or mining works. In these circles, where the average features of the race have been able to develop freely, escaping any intense or differentiated aspect, Arnold Bennett does not devote his attention to the industrial working man, who already is invested with associations or pitying or disquieted curiosity; but to a lower middle class of shopkeepers, clerks, professional people, whose characters are set off by no specially striking trait of any kind; a numerous class, shading off into a vast population, spread over the whole land, and owing its distinctive quality only to the local influences of the sky and the soil, as well as to the imperious will of the powerful industry on which, directly or indirectly, the district lives; a modern, neutral and prosaic subject-matter, if

there ever was any.  

Edwin Clayhanger, Sophia Baines and Hilda Lessways are true portraits of the new generation in the Potteries, while old Darius Clayhanger, Auntie Hamps and Mr. and Mrs. Baines are the incarnation of the passing Victorians. Mr. Bennett records the significant problems in their lives, he paints a graphic picture of an old age and a new age in conflict, which becomes ready material for the student of social history.

Enoch Arnold Bennett was born at Shelton near Hanley, one of the Five Towns, on May 27, 1867. As the son of a solicitor he spent his childhood and youth in the shadow of this dreary uninspiring industrial environment. Without artistic atmosphere, without social influence and without wealth, young Arnold Bennett's opportunities for a finished education were meager.

He attended the Endowed Middle School at Newcastle where he was more interested in water-coloring than he was in his studies. His education contributed nothing to a means of earning a livelihood. He seems to have been the living proto-type of young Clayhanger and Cyril. He was supposed to have attended the University of London, but this has been disputed. At the age of sixteen he began to study law with his father and six years later he established his residence in London where he found employment as a solicitor's clerk.

The literary London into which Bennett found his way was the London of the nineties. It would be difficult to imagine a contrast in environment more extreme. While the age of Queen Victoria was drawing to a close, all that her age had stood for in art, literature and morals was being repudiated by the young radicals with whom Bennett associated. Life was freedom, not the restraint of the Five Towns.

Money was not to be hoarded, but to be spent faster

than it was earned. Dickens, Thackeray, and the rest of the mid-Victorians were self-complacent hypocrites. Go whatever way he might, a man's career rarely brought the happiness which their novels promised. . . . Frustration of one's plans and ideals was the rule of life. . . .

Up to this period of his life his literary talents were dormant; his social contacts provincial and his outlook on life rather negative.

The gods of fiction were mostly French. They were Flaubert, the Goncourt, Maupassant, and Turgenev (who was classed with the French because he was read in French translation.) The secondary divinities were Zola and Balzac. Tolstoi was too moralistic, and Dostoevsky was as yet imperfectly known. Like his friends Bennett bowed his knee to foreign gods. He learned through Maupassant how Flaubert had crucified himself in search of the exact word or exact phrase for the expression of his ideas and emotions. Reading in French fiction incessantly, Bennett served his apprenticeship under Flaubert and Maupassant . . . . The facile journalist, who learned to manipulate words and phrases, without expressing ideas, acquired a style which, though never distinguished, was to prove adequate for narrative and description. . . . 2

Arnold Bennett now became a student of the French and Russian realists - the Goncourt, Flaubert, Maupassant, Turgenev, and Dostoievsky. They were the motivating forces which inspired in him the impulse to write. "French influence is responsible for Mr. Bennett's generalizing tendency, which can be seen in everything Mr. Bennett touches, but which is most easily observed in his treatment of love." 3 Mr. Bennett gives an interesting sidelight on the extent of his reading, in his famous Journal:

2. Ibid., pp.75-76.
A list of the masterpieces I have not read would fill a volume. With only one author can I call myself familiar, Jane Austen. With Keats and Stevenson, I have an acquaintance. Nevertheless, I cannot accuse myself of default. I have been extremely fond of reading since I was twenty, and since I was twenty I have read practically nothing (save professionally, as a literary critic) but what was "right." My leisure has been moderate, my desire strong and steady, my taste in selection certainly above the average, and yet in ten years I seem scarcely to have made an impression upon the intolerable multitude of volumes which "everyone is supposed to have read."¹

In 1896 he became sub-editor for a ladies' magazine, "Women." The flame of self-perfection, wealth and fame burned incessantly. His energy was endless, his memory and power of observation keen. These were the factors that contributed to his rapid success as a journalist. "A thorough understanding and appreciation of the topics, the situations, incidents, and characters that had the firmest hold upon the popular imagination. It gave him ideas, not purely literary ideas, but ideas of every description."² Weygandt said:

Journalism, in all its forms from the higher hackwork to reporting has given English literature, in old times as today, a good many of its great men. Defoe comes out of journalism, and Dickens, and Kipling, to name but three pointed examples. Journalism is a good school for writers, but like other schools it leaves those who pass through it with some habits that are better sloughed off.³

And still Arnold Bennett's estimate of himself in his Journal is as follows:

Again and again, I had to acknowledge inferiority of essential "character," apart from inessential talent—a lack of bigness, and presence of certain littleness. Yet at the same time, I

2. Priestley, op.cit., p.20
found us sturdy enough not to be ashamed of shortcomings. What we are, we are: "I exist as I am, that is enough." To hold such a creed religiously is in one way to be great.

A proud, self-unconscious self-esteem: that is what few people have. If at times it deserts me and mine, it always returns the stronger for having retreated. We are of the North, outwardly brusque, stoical, undemonstrative, scornful of the impulsive; inwardly all sentiment and crushed tenderness. We are of the North, incredibly, ruthlessly independent.¹

Four years later he resigned this editorship to seriously apply his talents in the literary field. It was in this same year, 1896, that he began to write his journal and also produced his first novel:

Friday, May 15th.

At noon precisely I finished my first novel, which was begun about the middle of April last year; but five-sixths of the work at least has been performed since the 1st of October. Yesterday, I sat down at 3 P.M. to write, and, with slight interruptions for meals, etc., kept as it till 1 A.M. this morning. The concluding chapter was written between 9 and 12 today.

My fears about In the Shadow are (1) that it is not well knit, (2) that it is hysterical, or at any rate strained in tone. Still, I should not be surprised if it impressed many respectable people. The worst parts of it seem to me to be in front of my Yellow Book story ("A Letter Home"), which came in for a full share of laudation.²

In 1898, two years after its acceptance, A Man from the North was published. It was "an imaginative account of himself since he had left Bursley."³ After resigning his editorship, in 1900, he went to live with his parents and sister, Tartia, at Trinity Hall Farm, Huckliffe, Bedfordshire. During the following year he wrote three plays: The Postmistress,

2. Ibid., p.8.  
3. Cross, op. cit., p.76.
Children of the Mist, and The Chancellor. The second in collaboration with Eden Phillpotts and the later in collaboration with Arthur Hooley, the draft of Anna Tellwright, half a dozen short stories, he wrote and published 196 articles, and also collected, revised and wrote a series of articles from the Academy--later called Fame and Fiction.

In the following year, 1901, Bennett went to live in France where he remained until 1913. It was during this period that his literary talents were most productive. In 1906 he became engaged to Eleanor Green, an American girl, two months later the engagement was broken, and on July 4, 1907, he married Marguerit Soulie at Paris. After a short stay in Paris he moved to Les Sablons, a suburb of Paris, and in a few years he was financially secure enough to buy a pretentious home in Fontainebleau. To Bennett, Fontainebleau exemplified "monde province" "much more province than Bursley." In a moving picture theatre which he attended he saw only the commercants--tradesmen.

Doubtless the society which considered itself haute kept away. And the theatre is in their minds designated as for the tradesmen. A plain interior, with a too low-arched roof, ugly with pitchpine, green hangings, and very badly disposed electric lights. Hard seats, with an appearance of chie. Very hard seats, after two hours.¹

During the twelve years he lived in France he made many visits to London and the Potteries. The charm and lure of the Five Towns held for him the same fascination and tender affection that it held for some of the characters in the Five Towns novels. He noted and contrasted its growth, its industrial social, religious, and political tendencies, then with his usual skill and irony he records them in his novels. To all that he observed, to every

¹ Bennett, Journal of Arnold Bennett, p.342.
significant social tendency he gives a meaning. The naive youth of the
Five Towns was now a successful novelist. His literary works were among
the best sellers. His zeal for writing and reading increased, his determin-
ation for financial independence obvious, and his social standing secure,
for he counted among his friends, his literary contemporaries, Shaw, Wells,
Phillpotts, Swinburne, and Galsworthy. Prolific indeed was this ambitious
novelist whose production of novels, verse, criticisms, plays, short stories,
scenarios, and mystery stories were the stepping stones to ready wealth and
fame. Therefore, the accusation of his contemporaries that too much of
Bennett's genius was squandered to net him ready capital, rather than last-
ing fame. Bennett was not concerned in posthumous fame, but rather with the
conscious realization that he was a part of a material world, where money
counted. His world was a world of action and events, he had a story to
tell and he possessed the ability to tell it. He did not pose, he did not
bow to an artificial god. He was like his characters, always himself.
Judging from the recordings in his Journal he seems to have been a "first
nighter" at the theatre from where he drew a host of friends among the
leads. When he was physically, or mentally indisposed from too much social
gaiety, or intensive writing, he took long walks in the rain, or cycled for
miles in the muddy roads. He found time to play Mozart's sonatas and
Chopin's mazurkas and study French. Amazing indeed was his versatility and
his vigor. August 30, 1908, he completed his masterpiece, Old Wives' Tale.
Now there was no denying as to the quality of his literary genius. He had
produced a graphic record, vivid and human, covering the social and
historical tendencies of industrial England. In it he stresses the human
element, and the influence of environment upon character.

He continued to write numerous short stories, plays, pocket philosophies and literary reviews and criticisms. During all this time he was building up a pattern for other novels with a Five Towns' background, and so the Clayhanger trilogy followed. In 1910 Clayhanger, 1911 Hilda Lessways and not until 1916 was the last of the trilogy, These Twain published. His last long novel Riceyman Steps was produced in 1923.

In 1911 Bennett, while at the crest of his popularity, visited America and returned to France in 1913. "He returned to England, bought a splendid house in Essex, and adjusted himself to a life of luxury and adulation . . . . In the years after 1914 his many interests dispersed his genius and he never equalled the work of his French period." In 1915 he spent a month as a war correspondent at the western front. Until his death on March 27, 1931, Bennett continued to write to please his public. His latter work included several books a year, novels, collections of essays and short stories, "practical philosophies" and plays - most of them, with the probable exception of Riceyman Steps, published in 1923, were doomed to speedy oblivion.

Thus ends the life of one of England's illustrious literary geniuses, a vivid personality, an exuberant delineator of the commonplace and the homely, who recorded the social tendencies, in the Five Towns, with a deft hand.

Bennett was brusque, outspoken, witty and tremendously keen on living, he was the symbol and perhaps the peak of middle class dominance in literature. He was the incarnation of the spirit of the bourgeois exulting in the luxury which industrialism had made possible for the plain man. It was

his power of observation that made him a great novelist. He did not create many great characters, but all of his characters have sensibility and like their creator are emotionally alive.¹

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL TENDENCIES FOUND IN THE CLAYHANGER

TRILOGY AND THE OLD WIVES' TALE

The Clayhanger trilogy and the Old Wives' Tale form a connected study of the evolution of the social tendencies in the Five Towns. In recording the biographies of Edwin Clayhanger and Hilda Lessways, and of Sophia and Constance Baines, Arnold Bennett produces a minutely documented social history of provincial and industrial England in the second half of the nineteenth century. He observes and records the prevailing fashions in dress, furniture, architecture, ways of living; he describes the changes in industrial society, manners and customs, class and family relationships, and education with the intensity and skill of a critical artist.

As Cunliffe puts it:

We learn in Old Wives' Tale about such changes as the introduction of public baths, free libraries, municipal parks, telephones and electric tram cars and automobiles, and in Clayhanger, we have reference to parliamentary Elections, Strikes, and religious revivals, but the reader would hardly gather that in the period covered by these two novels the intellectual, social and political life of England had undergone a revolution.¹

So complex are these social tendencies in this vanishing and transitional era that Bennett's meticulously analyzed cross section of the Five Towns becomes authentic source material for the student of social history.

It is one of the purposes of the present study to discover and evaluate some of the social tendencies of Victorian England as recorded by Bennett, and also to interpret some of Bennett's attitudes toward industrial society and social changes as expressed in his four novels.

According to Follett,

The dominant fact about the Five Towns is not that they are picturesque or provincial, though they are, but that they manufacture pottery. Without it they could not exist. The number of inhabitants, the lives they lead; the thoughts they think, the objects they see, the hopes they cherish, -- all are controlled and colored by one elemental fact.1

Arnold Bennett uses an extraordinary amount of descriptive detail to build a background which vibrates of the very atmosphere he desires to create. The real significance of this atmosphere is the influence it exercises upon the lower middle class Englishmen, whom Bennett selects for his protagonists. The characters of the inhabitants of the Five Towns are shaped by the overpowering influence of this industrialized locality and by the Victorian social tendencies of the provincial setting.

The atmosphere of ovens and chimneys, of smoke by day, and rudy glare by night, of mud and packing straw, of habits decreed and regulated by the laboring schedule, is omnipresent, and it creates the personal after its kind. It is woven intimately into the texture of their personalities. They bear the stamp of the conditions among which they grew, as Hardy's reddie man bears, in the very pores of his skin, the ruddy complexion of his trade.2

Yet the reconstruction of the social scene per se is only secondary to Bennett's preoccupation with the people who are affected by it. As Follett put it:

2. Ibid., p.215.
When Mr. Bennett deals with the Five Towns historically, as he often does, he is still dealing with people. As he traces the manufactures from the era of private and random enterprise down to the period of corporate monopoly, he is really tracing the different products of two generations of men, and hence the difference of the men themselves. Not the spectacle of industrialism alone, then, is the object of his interest and the source of his material, but the deferable results of that spectacle on individual and collective life.¹

Two types of families furnish Bennett with the characters around whom he builds the story. Both represent the breakdown of the Victorian era. Both, as a net result, give rise to the new social forms, and new types of people.

The Baineses represent the lower middle class of industrial England. The heroines of the novel brought up in the small drapery shop of St. Luke's Square are not the old generation: they are the young people on whose shoulders falls the burden of breaking away and of building the new world. Bennett confesses² that the impetus for the story was furnished by two different agents. The first was his meeting in a restaurant with a repulsive, fat elderly woman. It occurred to Bennett that the horrid creature must once have been a lovely slim girl. The process of living resulting in such a sad culmination, thought Bennett, would make an interesting experimental novel. A French model suggested itself to Bennett, who at the time was vitally interested in French literature. This was Maupassant's ³ Une Vie, the story of an average woman's life, from childhood unto death. Bennett decided to do one better. Instead of one woman he would take two.

Towns, where nothing ever shall happen to her. The other shall be subjected to all kinds of experimentation. Bennett shall make her face the world outside the Five Towns. He shall isolate her human stuff by divorcing her from the background which is so effective in camouflaging her real self. He shall study the two women, shall confront them with one another at the end of their existence, and shall try to discover "qu'est que ca que l'influence sociale des Five Towns."

According to Cross,

Neither Thackeray, who was fond of memories and family histories; nor Maupassant, from whom was derived the hint for Old Wives' Tale; nor Dostoevsky, whom Bennett now put at the head of all the novelists that ever appeared in the world; nor Balzac, though one may easily imagine Bennett setting out to do for the Five Towns what Balzac had done for all France. However much Bennett may have learned from his great predecessors, his art and procedure were his own. The Clayhanger trilogy and the Old Wives' Tale have, in the Aristotelian sense, no beginning, nor middle, nor end. And of plot, as understood by the Victorians, there are only traces.1

The other set of heroes, populating the Clayhanger trilogy, belong to the more successful upper middle class of the Potteries district. Curiously enough, Bennett's original idea was to describe the potteries of Staffordshire. In preparing for the writing Bennett read the gloomy memoirs of an old time potter, "When I was a Child," Stebbing Shaw's "North Staffordshire Potteries," and "re-read the social and industrial section of the Victorian history which contains a few juicy items that I can use."2 As far as we can judge, comparatively little remained of the original design of the novel dealing with the Potteries. The description of the childhood

1. Cross, op.cit., p.84.
of Darius "in the banks" occupies but a few pages. The social tendencies of the new generation occupy Bennett to the extent of three novels, and the setting is that of the printing business well known to the author through childhood experiences.

The protagonists are Darius' liberal son Edwin, and an emancipated woman, his wife, Hilda, who are brought into focus and dramatized in relation to the environment and to the society in which they live. They represent a new generation, with changing social tendencies, in conflict with the generation before them, in whom national characteristics are deeply rooted. The drab atmosphere of industrial England, peopled by drab individuals of Victorian England becomes a cavalcade of social history. The conduct of Hilda Lessways and Edwin Clayhanger, who represent a new era, is set against the generation before them. They become the center of the conflict which reflects opposing tendencies in the social standards of two eras.

Victorian customs and principles, as seen through Mrs. Lessways, Sarah Gailey, old Darius and Auntie Hamps are contrasted with twentieth century customs and principles, as seen through Hilda Lessways, Edwin Clayhanger and the Orgreaves children. Thus Hilda, coming in from outside the Five Towns, is oppressed by the "vast mediocre respectability" of the district.

She knew the very depths of domesticity (at Brighton) . . . but at Brighton the eye could find large, rich, luxurious and sometimes beautiful things for its distraction; and there was the sea. In the Five Towns there was nothing . . . . . . When you went inside the houses . . . . . you came at once into contrast with an ignoble race of slatternly imprisoned serfs with the mentality of serfs and the prodigious conceit of virtue. . . . . Talk to Auntie Hamps at home of lawn tennis or a musical evening, and she would set you down as flighty, and shift the conversation onto soaps or chapels.
And there were hundreds of houses in the Five Towns into which no ideas save the ideas of Auntie Hamps had ever penetrated, and ten and hundreds of thousands of such houses all over the industrial districts of Staffordshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, houses where to keep bits of wood clean, to fulfill the ceremonies of pietism and to help the poor to help themselves, was the highest good, the sole good.

In the Clayhanger trilogy and the Old Wives' Tale, Bennett minutely records the evolution of the house and of housing. The lives of the denizens of the Five Towns centered around their houses to a much greater degree than in more favored localities. Consequently, the houses carried the imprint of the tenants' personality. The gradual change, taking place in the architectural field symbolized the social tendencies of a changing world.

Victorian customs controlled the social tendencies of the inhabitants in this drab atmosphere. They were stereotyped individuals apparently satisfied with their narrow existence. Elizabeth Drew, in The Modern Novel, recounts Bennett's point of view on the situation.

A world of solid discomfort of St. Luke's Square, and rows and rows of streets like Freehold Villas, where there was nothing but narrowness... Places where people keep small shops or collect rents or run boarding houses. Revolting old men like Darius Clayhanger, Mr. Batchgrew and Critchlow, the chemist, and old women like Auntie Hamps, who wear "mantles" and bonnets trimmed with jet fruit and crepe leaves... These men and women are served by young girls, shapeless in sacking aprons, who slop dirty water over kitchen floors, and wring out steaming cloths with coarse, reddened hands, and behind the Nottingham lace curtains in the parlors they all eat tea at 6 o'clock, with mutton chops, and fried fish and eggs, and bacon, seated on slithery horsehair chairs... gloating over

1. Arnold Bennett, These Twain, pp.101-2.
death-beds, funerals, and catastrophes
and considering enjoyment outside a Sunday
School fete as deliberate sin. A drab
atmosphere, human and physical, all the
dirt and unloveliness of industrialism, with
the provincial stupidity, the inarticulate
pessimism, the religious bigotry and Puritan
hypocrisy of the English lower middle class
against the grey, dark smoky chill of the
English Midlands.1

Mr. Bennett says that in the year 1878 "Freehold Villas symbolized the
final triumph of Victorian economics. The Five Towns considered it an
achievement."2

Architecturally speaking, the early Victorian houses were incarnations
of ugliness. Originality in the use of materials and in the general
appearance of the structure were not attempted until the late seventies.
Comfort and beauty were not characteristic of the interior of dwellings at
this period.

Auntie Hamps had no sense of comfort and
no sense of beauty. She was incapable of leaning
back in a chair, and she regarded linoleum as one
of the most satisfactory inventions of the modern
age. She "saved" her carpets by means of patches
of linoleum, often stringy at the edges, and in
some rooms there was more linoleum than anything
else. . . . All her furniture was old, decrepit,
and ugly; it belonged to the worst Victorian
period, when every trace of the eighteenth
century had disappeared. The abode was always
oppressive.

(The sitting room was) . . . threadbare
. . . filled with profusion of morocco-bound
photograph albums, oleographs, and beady knick-
knacks . . . . .3

   pp.200-02.
2. Arnold Bennett, Hilda Lessways, p.11.
3. Arnold Bennett, These Twain, p.101.
The Clayhanger combined house and shop at Wedgewood Square expressed the prevailing architecture of the period.

All the brickwork of the facade was painted yellow, and had obviously been painted yellow many times; the woodwork of the plate-glass windows was a very dark green approaching black. The upper windows were stumpy, almost square, some dirty and some clean and curtained, with prominent sills and architraves. The line of the projecting spouting at the base of the roof was slightly curved through subsidence; at either end of the roofbridge rose twin chimneys each with three salmon colored chimney-pots...

New trends in architectural development were being realized by the more progressive citizens, as seen in the housing plans of Alderman Sutton, in the suburban Bleakbridge, and by frugal pioneers, like old Darius. These men were becoming self-conscious of their political prestige and social position in the eyes of their less prominent neighbors. They desired to impress them with their civic importance, and to display their material success through the creation of a more modern note in architecture.

Alderman Sutton, towards the end of the seventies, first pitted the new against the old in Bleakridge. The lifelong secretary of a first-class Building Society, he was responsible for a terrace of three commodious modern residences exactly opposite the house of the Member. . . . These houses cost twelve hundred pounds each . . . . and imposed themselves at once upon the respect and admiration of Bleakridge. A year or two later the Clayhanger house went up at the corner of Trafalgar Road and Hulton Street, and easily outvied the Sutton Houses.

Such fine erections, though nearly every detail of them challenged tradition, could not disturb Bleakridge's belief in the stability of society. But simultaneously whole streets of small cheap houses (in reality, pretentious cottages) rose round about . . . . All were modern,
and relatively spacious, and much superior in plan to the old. All had bay-windows. And yet all their bay-windows together could not produce an effect equal to one bay-window in ancient Manor Street, because they had omitted to be individual. Not one showy dwelling was unlike another, nor desired to be unlike another.1

Darius' new red brick house was in the second Victorian style, and denoted a break from the traditional austerity of the Georgian period in architecture and the stucco used represented the smugness in the first Victorian period. When Edwin was a youth, he saw the house as a poem and a work of art. While the exteriors of the second Victorian style were a decided improvement over their previous period in architecture, little thought was given to the interior, and hardly any consideration as far as comfortable furnishings were concerned. The bedrooms were without heat for most of the year and there was no evidence of an easy chair, a table to sit at, or a book to read. The early provincial Victorians were a hardy race, unaccustomed to comforts and indifferent to luxuries.

That twentieth century needs were luxuries to the Victorians can be gleaned from the description of Auntie Hamps' bedroom, during the last day of her illness:

In the half-light of the gas, still screened from the bed by the bonnet-box and the Bible, he glanced round amid the dark shadows at the mean and sinister ugliness of the historic chamber, the secret nest and withdrawing place of Auntie Hamps; and the real asceticism of her life and of the life of all her generation almost smote him. Half a century earlier such a room had represented comfort; in some details, as for instance in its bed, it represented luxury; and in half a century Auntie Hamps had learnt nothing

1. These Twain, p.5.
from the material progress of civilization but the use of the hot-water bag; her vanished and forgotten parents would have looked askance at the enervating luxuriousness of her hot-water bag -- unknown even to the crude wistful boy Edwin on the mantelpiece. And Auntie Hamps herself was wont as it were to atone for it by using the still tepid water therefrom for her morning toilet instead of having hot water brought up from the kitchen. Edwin thought: "Are we happier for these changes brought about by the mysterious force of evolution?" And answered very emphatically: "Yes, we are." He could not for anything have gone back to the austerities of his boyhood.1

But in 1892 outside influence in modern housing and comfortable interiors had crept into the Five Towns. Plumbing and heating plants were among the innovations to make the house of the later Victorians livable. Also, windows were built to open and admit ventilation which were unknown in the earlier Victorian Age. The wealth and culture in housing of the Five Towns in the later nineteenth century is best expressed through a description of the Orgreaves Lane End House:

Easy-chairs were common, and everywhere. Several bookcases rose to the low ceiling; dozens and dozens of picture hid the walls; each corner had its little society of objects; cushions and candlesticks abounded; the piano was a grand, and Edwin was astounded to see another piano, a small upright, in the further distance; there were even two fire places, with mirrors, two clocks, two sets of ornaments and two embroidered screens. The general effect was of extraordinary lavish profusion, of wilful, splendid, careless extravagance.2

The Five Towns owed their existence to the British industrialism of the nineteenth century. Every aspect of the Five Towns' life was conditioned by

1. These Twain, pp.425-26.
2. Ulysses, p.238.
the fact that the mass production of an important commodity required for its success that immense industrial plants be concentrated in a small area where there were enough needy people who could be forced to work in them.

The life of the underprivileged workers of English industries has been a familiar subject for many British authors since Thomas Hood, who in his "Song of the Shirt" thus characterized the hardships of the industrial workers in the forties:

Work - work - work!
My labor never flags!
And what are its wages? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread - and rags.
That shattered roof - and this naked floor -
A table - a broken chair -
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank
For sometimes falling there!

The beginning of the nineties which forms the setting for the Clayhanger trilogy, saw an obvious change in the status of the working man. Philanthropists, civic-minded individuals and Parliamentary enactments had succeeded in improving working conditions. The age limit for child-labor had been raised, working conditions were improved, hours of labor reduced and wages increased. The working man was becoming a self-conscious and assertive individual. Unions were coming into their own and strikes characterized the changing conditions in every field of industry. Clerks, machinists, artisans and the mass of unskilled laborers, both male and female, demanded recognition. The ruling class was identified with the Conservative Party, which pursued its selfish course under the pretense of defending the integrity of the Empire. They were slowly yielding the ground to the growing new force in the Liberal Party which, although in minority, had attracted the cooperation of the working classes, and, in the Five Towns, had a Labor
candidate for their Representative. Manchester, the stronghold of industrialism of which the Five Towns were miniature models and faithful imitators, was becoming a hot bed of anarchism. The Five Towns reverberations thereof caused the Conservatives to shake their heads in uncomfortable apprehension that the working man was overstepping his rights and that there was no stopping him by the means of any time-tested method.

The expedient of industrialist managed arbitrations, dating to the early eighties, had lost its prestige with the workers who had no more compunctions about breaking the agreements imposed upon them. The traditional annual wage settling date in November was no longer answering the workers' needs or desires. The Liberals of the Five Towns, as much as those of the rest of England were determined that the exploitation of the working man should cease.

Government regulations and inspections of factory conditions must eliminate existing evils in factories and pot-banks, where young girls, ragged lads, and old women were permitted to slave in their greasy tasks amid heat, noise and mingled odors of deplorable shops.

In his trilogy and the Old Wives' Tale, Arnold Bennett is not particularly concerned with the descriptions of the life of the industrial workers themselves. His social criticism concerns itself with the existence of other people - the "tradesmen" and the employer classes as affected by the all pervading blighting atmosphere of the industrial community.

Many of Bennett's heroes are not even aware of their unalienable dependence on the Potteries. The denizens of St. Luke's Square, which contained "five public houses, a bank, a barber's, a confectioner's, three
grocers', two chemists', an ironmonger's, a clother's, and five drapers' all of them catering to the workers ignored the staple manufacturer as perfectly as the district ignored the county." Yet
"The architecture of the Five Towns is an architecture of ovens and chimneys. its atmosphere is black as mud it burns and smokes all night, so that Longshaw has been compared to hell. it lives crammed together in slippery streets where the housewife must change white window-curtains at least once a fortnight if she wishes to remain respectable gets up at six a.m., winter and summer, and goes to bed when the public houses close that you may drink tea out of a teacup and toy with a chop on the plate for all the everyday crockery used in the kingdom is made in the Five Towns -- all, and much besides."

Bennett's ostensibly casual comments on the milieu and its evolution, on labor movements and the progress of machinery form a comprehensive picture of industrial history from the "horse and buggy" days to the era of the electric railways, which probably shall be of inestimable value to the sociologists of the future.

The childhood of Darius is spent in the Potteries. The industrialism of the 1830's is characterized by intolerable working conditions, wide use of child labor, impossible wages and absence of any safeguards of workers' rights. Young Darius, whose education was completed at the age of seven, was taught to read and knit, in Widow Susan's home, but of writing and figures he knew nothing.

1. Old Wives' Tale, p.5
Fourteen hours of hard labor a day on the pot-bank, increased the family budget by a shilling a week. Advancement comes within a year and he becomes a handle maker in a factory. The labor is lighter and the wages slightly higher. The working conditions are best described by quoting Bennett:

The long cellar never received any air except by way of the steps and a passage, and never any daylight at all. Its sole illumination was a stove used for drying. The "throwers" and the "turners" rooms were also subterranean dungeons. When in full activity all these stinking cellars were full of men, boys, and young women, working close together in a hot twilight. Certain boys were trained contrabandists of beer, and beer came steadily into the dungeons as though it had been laid on by a main pipe. It was not honourable, even on the part of a young woman, to refuse beer, particularly when the beer happened to arrive in the late afternoon. On such occasions young men and women would often entirely omit to go home of a night, and seasoned men of the world, age eight, on descending into the dungeons early next morning, would have a full view of pandemonium, and they would witness during the day solitary scenes of remorse, and proofs of the existence of a profound belief in the homeopathic properties of beer.1

When, as a result of being too prominent in a strike, Darius' father becomes black-listed by the manufacturers, the family has to become "public charges" in the workhouse, "Bastile" as the place was called. Young Darius becomes "the little boy from the Bastille."2 Young Darius gives the reader an opportunity to glimpse into the workhouse. Then there was rattling of key bunches, and the rasping voices of sour officials, who did not enquire if they would like a meal after their stroll. And they were put into a cellar and washed and dressed in other people's clothes, and then separated amid tears. And Darius was

2. Ibid., p. 515
pitched into a large crowd of other boys, all clothed like himself.¹

Child Darius grows up, and becomes the owner of a printing establishment. His experiences as a proletarian probably do not mitigate greatly the lot of his employees. He is deferential to his foreman, Big Jim, and he does not dare to oppose the unions openly, before his foreman. Yet the working conditions in the Clayhanger establishment were not a model of comfort or liberalism. The description of the unhygienic ramshackle plant suggests that the lot of the apprentices in Darius' establishment was not too pleasant. Darius was against trade unions, thought that it was foolish for a tradesman to mix himself with politics, and, though nominally a member of the Liberal Party, was worried by the tendencies of England.

The new spirit of the age is illustrated by Edwin. The coming of a new era is heralded a decade before his time, when the trade unions "after about three-quarters of a century of taboo . . . . ceased to be regarded as associations of anarchistic criminals." Big James was cautiously in favor of trade unions, and even old Darius in late life is not a quite uncompromising opponent of them. Yet it would be quite beyond them to think like Edwin whether "it was right": for instance, that the working girls should be "so dependent on him, so submissive, so subjugated, so soiled, so vulgar."² that their wages should scarcely suffice to keep his wife in boots and gloves.

In his youth Edwin feels very strongly on the side of the workers:

Father's against them . . . . because they broke the last arbitration award. But I'm not my father . . . .
I'll tell you what I think - workmen on strike are always in the right; at bottom I mean. You've only

¹ Clayhanger, p. 40.  ² These Twain, p. 232.
got to look at them in a crowd together. They don't starve themselves for fun.1

When Edwin inherits the establishment and becomes an ambitious go-getting printer, he does not lose his liberalism. Unlike his father, who thought that the workers were getting too much, that with the unions and the Labor movement, Edwin is far from being satisfied with the status quo. "Under the influence of strikes and anarchist meetings he felt with foreboding and even with a little personal alarm that something was wrong."2 It was wrong that "he could distribute ruin with a gesture and nobody could bring him to book"; it was wrong that "the greasy, slatternly girls he employed were underpaid -- and, really, had no chance," while he was getting richer every day, and safer. Edwin's reaction was that of defeatism. "Not those girls, not his works, not this industry, and that, was wrong. All was wrong. And it was impossible to imagine any future period when all would not be wrong."

Edwin knew that the struggle toward perfection was instinctive and had to go on. "The danger was (in Edwin's eyes) of letting that particular struggle monopolize one's energy. Well, he would not let it. He did a little here and a little there, and he voted democratically and in his heart was most destructively sarcastic about toryism."3 Yet, he was "born to be a master, he would be one, and not spend his days in trying to overthrow mastery."4 Well he knew that he could not appreciably improve the lot of his workers, "partly for business reasons, partly because any attempt to do so would bring the community about his ears and he would be labelled as a doctrinaire and a fool. . . . ."5

2. These Twain, p.320.
3. Ibid.,
4. Ibid., p.321.
5. Ibid.
Edwin's attitude has something of Bennett's lack of positive idealism for which he is unanimously berated by his critics. Bennett's characterization of an uncompromising idealist seems to lack in sympathy what he lavishes on Edwin. Ingpen, as a factory inspector, represents something of the "potential might of the whole organized kingdom." He is eminently business-like at the performance of his duty, and is little affected by the considerations of friendship when ordering his friends to make the changes needed to improve the working conditions. Bennett has surprisingly little to say about Ingpen's ideas on industrialism, labor, or capital, and very much on his role as one of the sophisticates in Hilda's circle.

The tradesman-class attitudes toward employees are best characterized by the relations of the master and the servant. The servant girl and the charwoman were human machines. They were at the mercy of tyrannical mistresses and prejudiced old women. Young girls at the age of thirteen were hired out to drudge from five in the morning until late at night. A meager allowance of left-over food was considered adequate fare to sustain life in her body. An uninhabitable room without heat, in the attic or basement, with a cot, possibly a broken chair, a candle to be burned sparingly, provided the setting for the short rest periods of the servant.

Bennett's gallery of servant types is unrelieved in the sheer dehumanization of the subject. Baineses' servant Maggie works in an underground unventilated cellar. She is underpaid, humbled, underfed. Any human manifestations about here are ridiculed by her employers. The servant is always an intruder, outsider, an enemy, even in the comparatively kindly household like Baineses. In a more typically Victorian middle classhouse-
hold, that of Auntie Hamps "who changed her help very often," the help is fed on drippings instead of butter. The employer is, however, concerned with the "spiritual well being" of the slaveys, and these are forced to belong to the church of the employer, and to give up their short hours of rest to go to the insipid Bible Classes and chapel services. Deviations from the straight and narrow path, even when they do not affect the employer, are visited with dire punishments. Auntie's last concern on her death bed is that her sinning servant should not benefit by an extra meal in her house. The inherent injustice of the situation is readily perceived by the non-Victorian Hilda, who is brought up in brighter milieu:

She perceived that domesticity was not life, but that, nevertheless, it consumed the life of the servant. She saw no reason why "The kitchen floor must inevitably be washed every day by a girl on her knees in sackcloth with terrible hands." She was witnessing now the first stage in the progress of a victim of the business of domesticity. Today Florrie was a charming young creature, full of slender grace. Soon she would be a dehumanized drudge. And Hilda could not stop it. All over the town, in every street of the town, behind all the nice curtains and blinds, the same hidden shame was being enacted: a vast, sloppy, steaming, greasy, social horror -- inevitable! It amounted to barbarism, Hilda thought in her revolt. She turned from it with loathing. And yet nobody else seemed to turn from it with loathing.1

Like the lives of the big industrialists of the Five Towns, the lives of the Bajineses, Poveys and Clayhangers were identified, determined and concerned more by the profits from their business and the progress of the pottery industries than they were in the welfare of their servants.

Thus Arnold Bennett, who disavowed any interest in the social and industrial history of his age, nevertheless has left a valuable document.

to the student of social history in his Five Towns' novels, and his sympathies are outspokenly with Hilda of the New Era rather than with the magnificently Victorian Auntie Hamps.

Class distinction as an ever-present social statisfaction of England was as important in the Victorian Era as it was before or after Arnold Bennett takes cognizance of the class distinction existing in the Five Towns. He analyses it, and presents a panoramic view of the changes, in relation to classes, which were engendered in the industrial revolution, and continued changing during the span he covered.

Class consciousness was probably more intensified in the compact communities of the Five Towns, than it was in the loosely articulated large cities. People were born indentured to the Five Towns, and automatically fell into the classes with little opportunity of moving up or down the social scale.

Arnold Bennett himself had good reasons to be exceptionally well aware of the problems of class distinction. A native of Hanley, "he stayed in the world where he was born, and according to the social theory of his age, should have stayed forever; long enough to become a first-rate solicitor's clerk." But it was to Bennett's credit that he managed to break his inherited shackles, by unbelievably hard work and dogged determination, and became a peer amongst the public-school trained litterati of England.

There is very little doubt that the sharp class distinctions in the Five Towns were prompted by a sort of inferiority complex peculiar to the English middle classes. The "tradesman," forming the great majority of Bennett's characters, was held in contempt by all other classes.

The professional classes, all those who lived on their investments, the nobility and gentry, all alike looked down on him. Schools of any pretensions whatsoever would receive none whose fathers were "in trade." The universities, the Army, the Navy, the civil service were chill. The upper classes were insolent - not only in their manners when they had to deal with the lower orders, but in their freedom from constraint . . . . so far from being punished for it, they remained triumphantly the governing class.¹

In compensation, the "Tradesman," England set itself as a guardian of morals of the country, and became restricted to "better than thou" type of Puritan morality. It developed a system of ethics based on the assumption that "making money, however harshly and narrowly the process was conducted, was the proper occupation for a moral man."²

The stooge for the "Tradesman" class was the artisan class, represented by the servants and industrial employees.

These unfortunates were despised for their physical uncleanliness, because "cleanliness next to Godliness" was one of the dicta of the fussy "Tradesman" women who had appallingly few other interests in life outside of their homes. The "Lower Classes" were considered morally prone to laziness, because their frugal employers could not constitutionally be satisfied with the amount of work done for their much valued money. Their drunkenness and poverty were both considered as preventable faults by the smug and rather well-to-do Pharisees, sitting at the rudders of the rather pitiless industrial set-up.

Arnold Bennett seldom preaches social gospels nor points out a moral. His customary approach to social criticism is that of a subtle and taciturn

1. R. West, Arnold Bennett Himself, p.10.
2. Ibid., p.8
innuendo. Yet he employs more than overt sarcasm when he speaks of the class attitudes of the Five Towns.

Thus when an epidemic of hold-ups breaks out in Bursley as a result of the depression of the trade, unemployment, and exceptionally rigorous weather, Bursleyites think that:

The lower classes were forgetting their manners - and this in spite of the altruistic and noble efforts of their social superiors to relieve the destitution due, of course, to short sighted improvidence when (the social superiors were asking in despair) - will the lower classes learn to put by for a rainy day? (They might have said a snowy and a frosty day). It was "really too bad" of the lower classes, when everything that could be done was being done for them, to kill, or even attempt to kill, the goose that lays the golden eggs! 1

The fact that any member of the lower class, should be possessed of a God-given talent was a revelation to young Edwin. After hearing Big James sing "The Miller of the Dee" at the Dragon, in 1852,

Edwin was humbled that he should have been so blind to what Big James was. He had always regarded Big James as a dull, decent, somewhat peculiar fellow in a dirty apron, who was his father's foreman. 2

Edwin Clayhanger, who represents the new and more democratic generation possessed the demeanor of the upper classes. His consciousness of the social standing of the employer and the employed will not permit him to be too free with his father's employees. Big James, a compositor in the Clayhanger printing shop, and "a very superior man" 3 in the estimation of the Five Towns, had asked Edwin to join him in a visit to the Dragon.

2. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, p. 95.
3. Ibid., p. 79.
local "gin-place,"¹ and "gaming saloon,"² where he sang every night except Sunday. But young Edwin remembers that he is of the superior class and "shrugged his shoulders, superiorly, indicating by instinct, in spite of himself, that possibly Big James was trespassing over the social line that divided them."³

The top rungs of the social scale of the Five Towns were represented by the richer employers, like Clayhanger after his assent to power, and the professional people. The former class did not really differ from the "Tradesmen" except in the amount of money. Aunty Hamps was in many respects like Mrs. Baines. The professional people did not associate with the "Tradesman" class other than professionally. "Lawyer Lawton did not consort with trades people. He was jolly with them, but he was not one of them. His friends came from afar."⁴

The aloofness of the professional people did not arouse any special envy in the Five Towns. As a rule, the burghers of Staffordshire could persist in their smug self satisfaction because they had few contacts with the world of sophisticated gentry whenever they were brought in contact with the latter, their drabness was brought home to them. Thus Hilda's class consciousness was strongly exhibited when she realized the superiority of her more prosperous friends, the Heskeths of Devonshire. They possessed wealth, servants, horses, and lived in the luxuriously furnished Tavy Mansion. They were self assured, well-bred, and lived in an ideal world.

1. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, p.95.
2. Ibid., p.76.
3. Ibid., pp.83-84.
4. The Old Wives' Tale, p.100.
Hilda contrasted her position with theirs and silently envied them. She said of Mr. Hesketh, "Very obviously he belonged to a class superior to Hilda's, but he was apparently quite unconscious of what was still the most deeply-rooted and influential institution of English life."

According to the social standards of the Five Towns, Edwin Clayhanger was a successful and important individual in Bursley. However, his accomplishments fell short when contrasted with a member of the upper classes.

The great families of the district, the Peeles and Wedgwoods, were a thing apart. In their utter Britishness, the Five Towns were religiously overawed, proud, and unresentful of their own princes of blood, forming the apex of their social pyramid.

Constance Baines, meeting Matthew Peel who had become a friend of her son, becomes "simple and naive."

She blushed slightly, smiling with a timid pleasure. For her, Matthew belonged to a superior race. He bore the almost sacred name of Peel. His family had been distinguished in the district for generations. 'Peel! You could not without impropriety, utter it in the same breath as with "Wedgwood," and "Swynnerton" stood not much lower. Neither her self respect, which was great, nor her common sense, which far exceeded the average could enable her to extend as far as Peel the theory that one man is as good as another. The Peels never shopped in St. Luke's Square. Even in its golden days the Square could not have expected such a condescension .......why, she had not in six years recovered from her surprise that her son and Matthew Peel Swynnerton treated each other rudely as equals!"

Class distinction was a definite factor in the social life of industrial England. The industries of the smoky Five Towns created the filthy slums.

where brutality and futility reigned paramount. Its worn and shabby inhabitants gave their energy, their time and, in fact, their lives to serve, maintain and satisfy the greed of their frugal employers. And the industries of the smoky Five Towns also created the exclusive suburb of Bleakridge, where respectability and caste importance reigned paramount. Its temperate and thrifty citizens felt their importance, held themselves aloof from the masses and continued to exploit their menials and employees.

Arnold Bennett says: "Like incompatible liquids congealed in a pot, the two components had run into each other and mingled, but never mixed."¹

And as to their traditional English self-estimation he permits them to say: "'Most folks are nobodies, but I am somebody.' And this was true."²

The family was the basic unit of society in the earlier years of Victorian England in the Five Towns. The father was the pivot around which revolved the submissive wife and the timid children, who dared not question his exacting demands, nor assert their rightful position. The atmosphere within the home was one of restraint, submission and oppression. Human relations between the members of the family and between the husband and wife were based upon aloofness and fear. Rarely was there any evidence of outward display in affection between the members of the family. The status of the wife was almost Oriental. She was a martyr to her housewifely duties and ideals, her entire world was the home and domesticity, prayer meetings and church socials were her outlets for self-expression.

¹. Arnold Bennett, These Twain, p.1.
². Ibid., p.3.
husband's social contacts and business enterprises were his own, they were sacred and never discussed within the family circle. Old Darius is a typical example of the mid-Victorian father, for when he chose to be late for dinner,

No one asked where or why he had been detained; it was not etiquette to do so. If father had been 'called away' or 'had to go away' or was 'kept somewhere', the details were out of deference allowed to remain a mystery respected by curiosity . . . . . 'Father-business' . . . all business was sacred. He himself had enculcated this attitude.\(^1\)

The child's attitude to the parent was one of fear and distrust, as a youth it was submission, and in maturity it had reached the stage of distrust and rebellion. Mr. Bennett said: "Thus the life of the children was a demoralising mixture of rigid discipline and freedom. They were permitted nothing, but, as the years passed, they might take nearly anything."\(^2\)

Circumstances did not permit the lower middle class to indulge in formal hospitality. Neighbors and relatives made casual calls, but appointed visits were made only on rare occasions and extra holidays.

Hundreds of well-to-do and socially unimpeachable citizens never gave a meal or received an invitation to a meal. The reason for all this was not meanness, for no community outside of America has had more generous instincts than the Five Towns, it was merely a primitive self-conscious striving to conceal itself beneath breezy disdain for those more highly developed manners which it read about with industry and joy in the newspapers, but which it lacked the courage to imitate.\(^3\)

Even as late as 1897 the inhabitants of the Five Towns "had an aversion for every sort of formal hospitality, or indeed any hospitality other than

2. Ibid., pp.163-64.
3. Ibid., p.526.
the impulsive and the haphazard."

The literary tendencies of the mid-Victorian period, in the Five Towns, is reflected by the reading done by its inhabitants. Auntie Hamps never glanced at a newspaper, but she kept her religious inspiration "Lean Hard" on the table in her bedroom. Mrs. Lessways, kept her one volume "The Girls' Week Day Book" securely tucked away in her trunk. Old Darius read "The Christian News" on Sunday and kept abreast with the political situations by subscribing to "The Signal."

The 1880's saw great changes in the literary progress of the proletarians of the Five Towns. Municipal Libraries and public-lending libraries were not uncommon. Hilda represented the new generation and read everything she could get her hands on. She could recite passages from Tennyson's In Memoriam and owned a copy of Maud. She could debate the merits of Voltaire and greatly admired Byron's Don Juan and Childe Harold. When an adult, Edwin read Swift's Tale of a Tub, Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris, to say nothing of the rare indulgence, for a young man in the Five Towns, to read Harper's.

The theatre was not a factor in the lives of mid-Victorians, however, the rising generation patronized the melodramatic productions of a travelling stock company and Bursley's only theatre called the Blood Tub.

It was of wooden sides and a canvas roof, and would hold quite a crowd of people. In front of it was a platform, and an orchestra, lighted by oil flares . . . . . Leaning against the platform was a blackboard on which was chalked the announcement of two plays: "The Forty Thieves" (author unstated) and Cruickshank's "The Bottle."²

1. Arnold Bennett, These Twain, p.527.
2. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, p.85.
Classical music was not unknown to the more cultured families in the Five Towns. The Orgreaves represent this class, who boasted of a baby grand and an up-right piano. Mr. Orgreave said: 'It's more than our place is worth to breathe aloud while these Rubinstein's are doing Beethoven!'\(^1\)

As for Edwin who represented a more provincial class "did not know enough of music to be able to turn the pages for others."\(^2\)

The educational system of Middle Class Provincial England is an important part of the social picture as presented by Bennett. Edwin Clayhanger goes through the mill that produces Baineses, Critchlowes, and Orgreaves. He is, of course, much more fortunate than his father who had to go through the education typical of the lower classes and at an earlier period. But it is to be questioned whether the product of the Oldcastle Middle School was any better prepared to face life with confidence and derive pleasure from living than the student of Widow Susan, who finished his education at seven, and immediately started working at the Potteries.

In the case of the father, the education consisted in acquiring the knowledge of the alphabet - from the alphabet, "passing to the reading made easy, and then to the Bible."\(^3\) Manual training was represented by knitting, and Darius "knit stockings for his father, mother, and sister."\(^4\) Early contact with the realities of life and the night schools taught Darius whatever else he needed to escape from the circumscribed world of the proletarian and become a self-satisfied and relatively successful member of his society.

1 Arhold Bennett, Clayhanger, p.242.
2 Ibid., p.246.
3 Ibid., p.31
4 Ibid., p.32.
Edwin's school is typical of the schools which were accessible to the upper "Tradesman Class." Its curriculum was patterned after the famous public schools of England which, in turn, clung to the general pattern of the trivium and quadrivium of the Middle Ages, less the music. Edwin's school, being a day school, and not an aristocratic one, probably lacked the great stimulus of inspiring personalities like Dr. Arnold of Rugby, who lived amongst his charges and supplied whatever was missing in the classical curriculum of the Public School. So Edwin "had not learned how to express himself orally in any language, but through hard drilling, he was genuinely erudite in accidence and syntax that he could parse and analyze with superb assurance the most magnificent sentences of Milton, Virgil, and Racine..." He was perfectly ignorant of geology, though he "lived in a district whose whole livelihood depended on the scientific use of the subject matter." He was aware of all the rivers of Asia in their order, and could name the capitals of nearly all the United States, but "he had never been instructed for five minutes in the geography of his native country." He had acquired "absolutely nothing about political economy;" and in what regards history, it "hung unsupported and unsupporting in the air," and it had never been hinted to him that it bears immediately upon modern life and bore on his own life. "Once his form 'got' as far as the infancy of his own father, and concerning this period he had learnt that 'great dissatisfaction prevailed among the labouring classes, who were led to believe by mischievous demagogues,' etc." "but it seemed to him that for administrative reasons he was always being dragged back again to the Middle Ages." 

2. Ibid., p. 13. 
3. Ibid., p. 13.
Doubtless the worthy professors were duly cognizant of the fact that their pay-checks derived from the sources controlled by forces that would stand for no demagoguery!

The finer requirements of a cultured existence were as thoroughly ignored as the considerations of a practical nature. "Of art and the arts, he had been taught nothing . . . . Of the art of English literature, or of any other literature, he had likewise been taught nothing. But he knew the meaning of a few obsolete words in a few plays of Shakespeare."

There was no reason whatsoever to think that a school like that could train men to take their place in competitive society. The school was a formality, a silly tradition which had to be complied with in order to retain one's standing in a respectable community. There was no attempt to introduce a professional element in the education - in fact, the whole Victorian attitude toward professional education as contrasted with office apprenticeship is probably best illustrated by Henry Lord Brougham in an 1846 British Parliamentary Report on legal education: "I won't say it's a humbug, but it's something very like it. . . . ."¹

The secret hopes of Edwin to continue his education and to become an architect are cut short by his father, who never discusses with Edwin his future, but takes it for granted that his son shall follow in his steps, and only hopes that Edwin will not muddle it. "What's this business o'mine for, if it is'na for you?" asked his father. "'Architecting. There's neither sense nor reason in it! Neither sense nor reason!"²

Darius better than anyone else perceives the ludicrousness and useless-

He compared Edwin at sixteen with himself at the same age. Edwin had never had a care, never suffered a privation, never been forced to think for himself. (Darius might more justly have put it, - never been allowed to think for himself.) Edwin had lived in cotton-wool, and knew less of the world than his father had known at half his years; much less. Darius was sure that Edwin had never even come near suspecting the miracles which his father had accomplished: this was true, and not merely was Edwin stupendously ignorant, and even pettily scornful, of realities, but he was ignorant of his own ignorance. Education! . . . Darius snorted. To Darius it seemed that Edwin's education was like lying down in an orchard in lovely summer and having ripe fruit dropped into your mouth . . .

The situation is quite different in the later generations. Both Cyril Povey and George, son of Hilda, get their heart's desire and are sent, one to art school, the other, after finishing a good public school outside the Five Towns, to the architectural school.

The education of the lower classes is changed for the better at a much earlier date, with the passage of the Public School Act which is much deprecated by the substantial tax-payers of the Five Towns.

Women's education in the Five Towns is considerably different from that of men. The emphasis here is on "culture," but of a very limited definition. Both Hilda Lessways and Sophia Baines go to Miss Chetwyn's School for Ladies, where the program includes

. . . . 'a sound and religious course of training,' 'study embracing the usual branches of English, with music by a talented master, drawing, dancing, and calisthenics.' Also 'needlework plain and ornamental;' also 'moral influence;' . . . . As an illustration of the delicacy of fern-fronds, that single word 'dancing' had nearly lost her Constance and Sophis seven years before?

The education of women is not taken seriously. Baines' girls are taken out of school before graduation, not because of any financial need but because they might be used in business.

The only profession open to women at the beginning of the New Era is that of school teaching - but even that is held in abhorrence by the money-minded burghers like Mrs. Baines:

Orphans, widows, and spinsters of a certain age suddenly thrown on the world - these were the women who, naturally, became teachers, because they had to become something. But that the daughter of comfortable parents, surrounded by love and the pleasures of an excellent home, should wish to teach in a school was beyond the horizons of Mrs. Baines's common sense.¹

A business career for a girl was unheard of in the Five Towns of Victorian England. "In 1878, unless pushed by necessity, no girl might dream of a vocation; the idea was monstrous; it was almost unmentionable."²

Hilda Lessways, living some years later, sees the dawn of women's coming independence. She revolts against the eternal drudgery of domesticity, nor is she in sympathy with her provincial mother, whose thin wrinkled face is always framed by the flannel petticoat worn around her head and shoulders. According to Bennett, "Hilda's heart revolted, less against her mother's defects as an organizer than against the odiousness of the whole business of domesticity."³ But the year 1880 sees new trends in business and unheard of opportunities for women. Pittman's shorthand is revolutionising the business world and journalism in Turnhill and Handbridge are making great strides. And in these new trends Hilda sees her escape from domesticity. "No young woman had ever done what she was doing. She was the only girl in the Five Towns who knew shorthand."⁴

Mr. Bennett points out the tremendous influence on the happiness of a young girl, in this new social tendency. Hilda's "life became grand. Her situation was not ordinary, it was unique."

The religion of Victorian Staffordshire centered around two dissenting sects of Methodism, the Wesleyan and the Primitive. Both sects were peculiar to the middle and lower classes respectively, and both vied with one another to assert their spiritual vigor. The Wesleyans, "by the odd method of building more chapels!" It is difficult to say which owes more to the other, the peculiarities of the middle class mentality, to the unemotional, unesthetic character of the Sect, or the drabness, narrowness, and superficiality of the Sects to the innate qualities of the classes which produced them.

In the span covered by Bennett's novels the religious phenomena observed in the Five Towns consisted in the eclipse of the Primitive Methodist and the growing predominance of the Wesleyan Methodist. As the lower class became rich they joined the Wesleyan Methodists. Arnold Bennett dwells on the Primitive Methodism as an expression of the lower classes who interested him as a milieu. From fragmentary implications scattered throughout his novels, we gather that Primitive Methodism, as all simple peoples' religion, was more deeply seated than Pharisaical Wesleyism. Together with the wakes it furnished the only escape from the drab reality of the oppressed in the Five Towns. Its ritual and outward forms were characterized by a lack of ostentation and a simplicity relieved by an.L. Hilda Lessways, p.157.
earnest effort to provide the people with social media for expressing their intellectual and spiritual interests. The Primitive Methodists were child-like and sincere in their acceptance of the faith of their fathers. They held strictly to traditional customs in the functions of their religion. They were horrified at Sir H. Thompson's new movement to prove the efficacy of prayer by a "Prayer Gauge" and also of the deferring of the "Anniversary Sermon from August to September, so that people should be more free to go away for a holiday and collections be more fruitful."

The Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Bursley was the rich man's church, characterized by unshakeable conservatism. In the sixties, it had already ceased to be "a sparse handful of persons disturbingly conscious of being in a minority," now, a magnificent and proud majority had collected, deeply aware of its rightness and its correctness. The chapels were characterized by ostentatiousness, great organs, and luxurious furnishings.

And the minister, backed by minor ministers, knelt and covered his face in the superb mahogany rostrum, and behind him, .....the choir knelt and covered their faces; and all around, in the richly painted gallery and on the ground floor, multitudinous rows of people, in easy circumstances of body and soul, knelt in high pews and covered their faces.

The Wesleyan Methodists were more concerned with amenities of church life than with the literal acceptance of the Bible. Their worship was supplemented by social events and organizations like Young Men's Debating Societies, and Centenary celebrations. The latter was characterized by a great display of clothes and ceremony.

1. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, p.29.
2. Ibid., p.29.
3. The Old Wives' Tale, p.93.
4. Ibid., p.93.
An irregular current of finery was setting in to the gates of the Wesleyan School yard, at the top of the Bank. And ceremoniously bedecked individuals of all ages, hurried in this direction and in that, some with white handkerchiefs over flowered hats, a few beneath parasols. All the town's store of Sunday clothes was in use. The humblest was crudely gay. Pawn brokers had full tills and empty shops, for twenty-four hours.¹

One of the outstanding characteristics of the church was its social standing. Mr. Povey, on his way to power was "a recent convert from Primitive Methodism in King Street to Wesleyan Methodism on Duck Bank...."² The conservatism of the church was due to the psychology of the influential people forming its congregation, who "were not merely content to live in town where their fathers had lived -- they were content also to believe what their fathers had believed about the beginning and the end of all. Accordingly, everyone being of the same mind, every one met on certain occasions in certain places to express the universal mind."³

Their theology was simple: "There was no such thing as the unknowable in those days. The eternal mysteries were as simple as an addition sum; a child could tell you with absolute certainty where you would be and what you would be doing a million years hence, and exactly what God thought of you."⁴

During the worship... there floated before them, in the intense and prolonged silence, the clear vision of Jehovah on a throne, a God of sixty or so with a moustache and beard, and a noncommittal expression, which declined to say whether or not he would require more bloodshed; ......and afar off was an obscene monstrosity, with cloven hoofs and a tail, who

¹. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, p.272.
². The Old Wives' Tale, p.93.
³. Ibid., p.93.
⁴. Ibid., p.93.
could exist comfortably in the midst of a coal-fire, and who took a malignant and exhaustless pleasure in coaxing you by false pretences into the same fire; but of course you had too much sense to swallow his wicked absurdities. Once a year, for ten minutes by the clock, you knelt thus, en masse, and by meditation convinced yourself that you had too much sense to swallow his wicked absurdities. And the hour was very solemn, the most solemn of all the hours.¹

The ministers of the Wesleyan Church were not as much a part of the people as the preachers of the Primitive Church. While the Wesleyan canons permitted ministers to marry, and celibacy was even discouraged

for the reason that wives and daughters are expected to toil in the cause, and their labor costs the circuit not a half-penny..... the canons forbid ministers to take root and found a home. Eleven times in thirty years Mr. Peartree had been forced to migrate to a strange circuit and to adapt his much-travelled furniture and family to a house which he had not chosen, and which his wife generally did not like.²

As a Superintendent Minister, Mr. Peartree was still, in spite of his middle class origin, removed from his flock:

During part of the period he had secretly resented the autocracy of Superintendent Ministers, and during the remainder he had learned that Superintendent Ministers are not absolute autocrats.

He was not overworked nor underpaid. He belonged to the small tradesman class, and, keeping a shop in St. Luke's Square, he might well have worked harder for less money than he now earned. His vocation however, ....had other grave drawbacks. It gave him contact with a vast number of human beings, but the abnormal proportion among them of visionaries, bigots, hypocrites, and petty office-seekers falsified his general estimate of humanity. Again, the canons rigorously forbade him to think freely for himself on the subjects which in theory most interested him; with the result that he had

¹. Arnold Bennett, Old Wives' Tale, p.93.  2. Oq. Cit.
remained extremely ignorant through the very fear of knowledge, that he was a warm enemy of freedom, and that he habitually carried intellectual dishonesty to the verge of cynicism. Thirdly, he was obliged always to be diplomatic .... and nature had not meant him for the diplomatic career. He was so sick of being all things to all men that he even dreamed diplomatic dreams as a galley-slave will dream of his oar; also he was sick of captivity, and this in no wise lessened his objection to freedom. He had lost all youthful enthusiasm, and was in fact equally bored with earth and with heaven. Nevertheless, he had authority and security. He was accustomed to the public gaze and to the forms of deference....Nothing but the inconceivable collapse of a powerful and wealthy sect could affect his position or his livelihood to the very end of his life. Hence, beneath his weariness and his professional attitudianism there was a hint of the devil-may-care that had its piquancy. He could foresee with indifference even the distant but approaching day when he would have to rise in the pulpit and assert that the literal inspiration in the Scriptures was not and never has been an essential article of Wesleyan faith.1

Typical of the highest brackets of the Wesleyan Connexion was Rev. Archibald Jones, the fashionable preacher:

Archibald Jones was one of the idols of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, a special preacher famous throughout England .... He was not an itinerant minister, migrating every three years. His function was to direct the affairs of the 'Book Room' the publishing department of the Connexion. He lived in London, and shot out into the provinces at week-ends, preaching on Sundays and giving a lecture, tinctured with bookishness, 'in the Chapel' on Monday evenings. In every town he visited, there was competition for the privileges of entertaining him. He had zeal, indefatigable wit, energy, and a breezy wit.2

Although most of Arnold Bennett's references on the religion, of the Five Towns concerns Methodism, he casually mentions the two major religions

1. Arnold Bennett, These Twain, pp.26-27.
of England, the Roman Catholic and the Established Church. But "The traditionalism of Bleakridge protected even Roman Catholicism in that district of nonconformity, where there were at least three Methodist chapels to every church and where the adjective 'popish' was commonly used in preference to 'papal.'

It need not be mentioned that the religion did not affect materially the inner lives of these people. Church going was considered as the correct thing to do; every family rented a pew as a part of the requisites for their social prestige. Yet during the services, most of the people were probably like Mr. Povey who was dwelling upon window tickets and injustice of women, instead of his relations with Jehovah and the tailed-one; gentle-eyed Constance, pattern of daughters who was risking her eternal welfare by smiling at the tailed one, who, concealing his tail, had assumed the image of Mr. Povey; Mrs. Baines, who, instead of resolving that Jehovah and not the tailed one should have ultimate rule over her, was resolving that she, and not Mr. Povey should have ultimate rule over her house and shop; Sophia alone was truly busy with immortal things: praying that her lover be returned to her!

Arnold Bennett does not record any instances of religious emotion amongst his characters. His favorite moderns are (both) rather anti religious. Edwin carries into his adult life his grudge against Methodism for depriving him of his half holidays during his childhood.

......(Edwin) had secretly borne a tremendous grudge against Mr. Peartree. He had execrated, anathematised, and utterly excommunicated Mr. Peartree, and had extended the fearful curse of his family, all his ancestors, and all his

1. Arnold Bennett, These Twain, p. 3
Descendants. When Mr. Peartree was young and fervent in the service of heaven he had the monstrous idea of instituting a Saturday afternoon Bible Class for schoolboys. Abetted by parents weak-minded and cruel, he had caught and horribly tortured some score of miserable victims, of whom Edwin was one. The bitter memory of those weekly half-holidays thieved from him and made desolate by a sanctimonious crank had never softened, nor had Edwin ever forgiven Mr. Peartree. As a result Edwin took a horrid pleasure in being unfair. He knew well that Methodism had produced many fine characters and played a part in the moral development of the race; but he would not listen to his own knowledge.¹

For all that, the social pressure connected with church-going was so strong, and the church-going tradition so strongly rooted, that Edwin had not formally left the Connexion—and was outwardly an apologetic rebel!

The word (Superintendent Minister) had never in thirty years quite failed to inspire in him some of the awe with which he had heard it as an infant. Just as a policeman was not an employee but a policeman, so a minister was not a person of the trading class who happened to have been through a certain educational establishment, subscribed to certain ceremonies and adopted a certain costume—but a minister, a being inexplicably endowed with authority....²

Another rebel, Hilda, originally an Episcopalian, was basically a heathen—in the tradition of Swinburn and Wilde:

... As she (Hilda) glanced with secret condescension at the listless Mr. Peartree she seemed to say: "What is all this talk of heaven and hell. I am in love with life and the senses, and everything is lawful to me, and I am above you."³

¹. Arnold Bennett, These Twain, p.28.
². Ibid., p.29.
³. Ibid., p.42.
She has no compunctions about stating her religious indifference before a preacher:

(Hilda declined to choose a pew); "You know that we're not great chapel-goers," she told Auntie Hamps. "Mrs. Edwin's family were Church of England," said Auntie Hamps, in the direction of Mr. Peartree. "Not great church-goers," Hilda finished cheerfully. No woman had ever made such outrageous remarks in the Five Towns before. A quarter of a century ago a man might have said as much, without suffering in esteem - might indeed have earned a certain intellectual prestige by the declaration; but it was otherwise with a woman.

Hilda and Edwin seem to express the younger generation's point of view on religion. To Hilda it was negative, it had no appeal, nor did it offer any consolation in times of stress.

She could never say, with joyous fervour: "I believe!" At best she could only assent that she did not disbelieve - and was she so sure even of that? No! belief had been denied her; and to dream of consolation from religion was sentimentally womanish; she preferred straightforward, honest damnation to the soft self-deceptions of feminine religiosity.

The Wesleyans of Bursley did not convince Edwin as to their righteousness in the interpretation of the Scriptures. He, like most of the youths of the Five Towns, hated the Bible classes on Saturday morning as well as the Sunday Schools.

The Free-thought movement was popular in England at this time. "Atheistical Bradlaugh had been exciting the British public to disputation for a long time, and the Bradlaugh question happened then to be acute." They complicated political situations by bringing theology into politics. Some of their outstanding leaders were antagonistic to certain customs of

1Arnold Bennett, These Twain, pp.43-44.
2Arnold Bennett, Hilda Lessways, p.183.
of Parliament. "In that very week the Northampton member had been committed to custody for outraging Parliament and released." Gladstone intended bringing a measure to eliminate the traditional custom "of taking oath by appealing to a god." Theology and politics were coupled as never before and thereby Bradlaugh succeeded in dividing some of the Tories and Liberals. Dissension among families was obvious as a result of difference in opinion on Bradlaugh's philosophy of religion. Timid individuals of the Five Towns dared not openly acknowledge their acceptance of such a godless movement. "Are you a Bradlaugh man?" And Edwin, uplifted, said: "All I say is - you can't help what you believe. You can't make yourself believe anything. And I don't see why you should, either. There's no virtue in believing."2

And again in Hilda Lessways, Bennett shows the force of the movement. "The conversation had turned upon Bradlaugh, the shameless free-thinker, the man who had known how to make himself the centre of discussion in every house in England."3

The election of 1886 brought out the color of politics in the Five Towns. The Liberals supported a Labor candidate, and revolted against the traditional British principles as to working-mans rights and the Home Rule Bill. However, they were strongly opposed and out-numbered by their opponents the Conservatives, who saw danger in turning over to the lower classes the reigns of local politics. The Conservatives were loyal to her Majesty the Queen and willing to devote themselves and sacrifice the individuals rights for the "integrity of the Empress."4

The cream of the town, of its brains, its success, its respectability, was assembled together, and the

Liberal party was practically unrepresented. It seemed as if there was no Liberal party. It seemed impossible that a Labor candidate could achieve anything but complete disaster at the polls. It seemed incredible that in the past a Liberal candidate had even been returned. Edwin began, even in the privacy of his own head, to be apologetic for his Liberalism. 

Nevertheless at the polls, the new generation, in the person of Edwin Clayhanger, voted for Labour. 

1. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, pp.519.
CHAPTER III

THE REALISM OF ARNOLD BENNETT RESULTING FROM HIS SOCIAL INVESTIGATIONS

The realism of Arnold Bennett is really a direct result of his social observation. In the Five Towns' novels Bennett deals with an eminently familiar ground. Both the drapery shop of the Baineses and the printing shop of the Clayhangers were actually a part of Bennett's childhood experiences. Whenever he had to depend upon research or imagination in constructing a background, he rapidly extricates himself from unfamiliar waters and begins to describe something he has actually seen or experienced. Thus his reading of source materials on English potteries resulted only in three hurried chapters dealing with Darius' childhood; the important setting of the novels was that of the printing shop with which he was personally familiar. His excursion into the history of the Siege of Paris, when he read "Sarcey's . . . looked at the pictures of Jules Claretie's popular work on the Siege and the Commune, . . . glanced at the printed collection of official documents and ended there his research" resulted only in the perception that "the ordinary people went on living very ordinary lives in Paris during the siege, and that to the vast man of the population the siege was not the dramatic, spectacular, thrilling, ecstatic affair that it is described in history." The Paris of the siege Bennett included was the humdrum everyday Paris he knew. The draper's shop in Old Wives' Tale was not a figment of imagination: as a child Bennett lived in it.

Bennett's position as an outstanding realist in English literature is thus described by John Cunliffe: "Of the English realists in narrative Arnold Bennett is easily first. No one knows the English middle class better, especially of his own midland towns, no one has observed them with more loving fidelity or portrayed them with more skillful sympathy."

Arnold Bennett's complete understanding of English provincial life in all its phases, his thorough knowledge of the every day experiences of its men and women are reflected in the realism with which he depicts atmosphere of English provincial and industrial life, and the personality of its men and women.

According to many critics, Bennett was particularly influenced by the French naturalists. This was particularly true of Bennett's taking large account of environment in the shaping of character.

"It was the happy lot of a French woman," writes Mrs. Arnold Bennett in her Arnold Bennett, "to witness the effort and anxiety and the success of a thoroughly English writer influenced by French literature, especially by the words of Maupassant, the Goncourts, Flaubert and above all Balzac."

Bennett's love of detail is inherited from Balzac. Bennett himself explains the value of this tendency when commenting on the great interest shown by Balzac in details:

This singular interest gives animation to the extraordinarily long descriptions and explanations which Balzac constantly employed. You can almost

4. Mrs. Arnold Bennett, Arnold Bennett, p.54.
hear him saying to you as he pants heavily through these preliminary pages: "Wait a minute. It's absolutely necessary that I should make this clear, otherwise you would not quite grasp the point... I'm coming to the story as fast as I can."

Bennett's debt to Maupassant has already been commented upon in the discussion of social tendencies. Maupassant's manifesto of realism, used as the concluding word of his Une Vie, "La vie, voyez-vous, ca n'est jamais si bon ni si mauvais qu'on croit," is implied by Bennett to be one of the basic positions of his creed as a realist. Thus Sophia, surveying her life, and life in general, is made to say, with a sort of tart but not sour cheerfulness: "Well, that is what life is!"3

Young Bennett was greatly influenced by the technical perfection of Flaubert:

As regards fiction, it seems to me that only within the last few years we absorbed from France that form for the artistic shapely presentation of truth and that feeling for words as words which animated Flaubert... and which is so exactly described and defined in Maupassant's introduction to the collected works of Flaubert... An artist must be interested primarily in presentation, not in the thing presented. He must have a passion for technique, a deep love of form... 4

While writing Clayhanger, Bennett records that some extracts from Flaubert's correspondence and French criticism, published by an English critic, has "certainly bucked up my novel quite appreciably."5 Yet Flaubert's un-realist-like habit of cutting himself off absolutely from the

1. A. Bennett, How to Become an Author, p.91.
2. Guy de Maupassant, Une Vie, p.380.
5. Ibid., p.370.
world in order to have peace provokes Bennett's characteristic criticism: "What a mad scheme for a novelist! It is this kind of thing in Flaubert that stopped him from being in the first rank."

Brothers Goncourt were amongst the first French infatuations of Bennett. "Of foreign authors I am familiar with de Maupassant and the de Goncourts' writes Bennett in 1896. According to Darton, Goncourts' famed Diary stimulated Bennett to begin his Journal: "The diary keeper resolved to write in the journal so many words a day, to improve his powers of observation; and he kept his word."

The best illustration of Bennett's use of his diary to embrace his realism - his utilization to the utmost of his own experiences - is furnished by a comparison of his account of his mother's funeral, as recorded in his Journal, and the description of Auntie Hamps' funeral in These Twain.

I

I learned from Jennings that the "last journey" had to be the longest, i.e., the corpse must always go longest way to cemetery. ....We naturally altered this

II

"Sham brass handles on coffin. Horrible lettering."6

Edwin was met by a saying that "the last journey must be the longest," which meant that the cortege must go up St. Luke's Square . . . . instead of taking the nearest way along Wedgwood Street. Edwin chose Wedgwood Street.5

II

"in the drawing room the coffin with its hideous brass plate and handles lay upon two chairs.7

2. Ibid., p.22.  
5. Bennett, These Twain, p.461.  
7. Bennett, These Twain, p.460.
III

Had to wait after service for hearse to arrive. Men hung their hats on spikes of hearse before coming in. No trouble in carrying coffin. 1

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IV

John Ford's vault next to Longson, with records of his young wives ("The flower fadeth," etc.) This could be exaggerated into a fine story. 3

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V - VI

Parson put on a Skull Cap. On return, carriages trotted down slope from cemetery, but walked as we got to houses near cobridge station. 5

2. Bennett, These Twain, p.464.
4. Bennett, These Twain, p.466.
6. Bennett, These Twain, p.466.

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III

The news that the hearse and coaches had not arrived helped them to talk a little .... The four mutes ripped down with agility from the hammerclothes, hung their greasy tophats on the ornamental spikes of the hearse and sneaked grimly into the house in a second .... with startling accomplished swiftness the coffin was darted out of the room. 2

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IV

Edwin scanned an adjoining tombstone, which marked the family vault of Isaac Plant, a renowned citizen. He read, chased in gilt letters on the Aberdeen granite, the following lines:

"Sacred to the memory of Adelaide Susan, wife of Isaac Plant, died 27th June, 1886, aged 47 years. And of Mary, wife of Isaac Plant, died 11th December, 1890, aged 33 years. And of Effie Harriet, wife of Isaac Plant, died 9th December, 1893, aged 27 years. "The Flower Fadeth" And of Isaac Plant, died 9th February, 1894, aged 79 years. I know that my Redeemer Liveth." And the passionate career of the aged and always respectable rip seemed to Edwin to have been a wondrous thing. The love of life was in Isaac Plant. He had risen above death again and again. 4
The ooaooes trotted down the first part of the hill into Bursley but as soon as the road became a street, with observant houses on either side, the pace was reduced to a proper solemnity. 1

In spite of his strong French leanings, Bennett is in reality an heir to a long British tradition of realism. Legouis, himself a Frenchman, thus characterizes Bennett's inherent Britishness:

Though unaware, in this field, of any conscious imitation, he takes up a tradition, that of minute, and at the same time broad and healthy realism, dwelling with indulgence upon the portraits of mediocre beings; his line is that of Dickens and George Eliot. No other is more English; and nothing is more national than the matter to which Arnold Bennett applies this method. Neither Dickens, whose social perspective is older by a whole century, nor George Eliot, who described a different world, had touched upon it before him. It is a drab and dull-looking mass of human beings, who swarm under the smoky skies of the industrial districts. Almost a parasitic growth, at first, in the body of the nation, it has become one of its essential and typical tissues. 2

Bennett portrays life as he sees it in its stark realism. British solidity, Victorian smugness, and twentieth century freedom are realistically depicted with a deft hand. Mr. Bennett's realism is particularly obvious in his descriptions of the sordidness in life, of the suffering of illness, of the grimness of death-bed scenes and squalor of poverty.

He does not use such descriptions for propaganda. There is no comment on such conditions and their crying injustice to the dignity of man; no appeal to our pity for suffering fellow creatures; no insistent determination that such things should cease. Only that quite and deadly irony which notes that

1. Bennett, These Twain, p.466.
"just opposite Rowton House, home of the defeated and futile, who bought a bed for a couple of coppers, the wisdom and enterprise of two railway companies had felled a blank wall with a poster," Why not take a Winter Holiday where Sunshine reigns?1

He shows the dull inhabitants of Victorian Turnhill morbibly delighting in tragedies. Mr. Skellorn, Mrs. Lessways' rent-collector, has had a paralytic stroke, and Mrs. Grant, Skellorn's daughter, conveys the news to the Lessways. Note the realism by which Mr. Bennett convinces the reader:

Mrs. Grant contemplates with solemn gleeful satisfaction the overwhelming grandeur of the disaster that had happened to her father. The old man, a continual figure of the streets, had been cut off in a moment from the world and condemned for life to a mattress. She sincerely imagined herself to be filled with the proper grief, but an aesthetic appreciation of the theatrical effectiveness of the misfortune was certainly stronger in her than any other feeling. Observing that Mrs. Lessways wept, she also took out her handkerchief.2

Mr. Bennett's realism prompts him to refer constantly to the physical disabilities of his characters. Sarah Gailey had "acute sciatica,"3 Mrs. Lessways had "nasal Symptoms,"4 Florie's father had "potter's asthma"5 and old Darius was a victim from "softening of the brain."6

Irony mingles with realism in his description of the death of Auntie Hamps:

She was unconscious either in sleep or otherwise - he could not tell how. And in her unconsciousness the losing but obstinate fight against the power which was dragging her over the edge of eternity still went on. It showed in the apprehensive

2. Bennett, Hilda Lessways, p.17.
3. Ibid., p.521.
4. Ibid., p.56.
5. Ibid., p.44.
character of her breathing, which made a little momentary periodic cloud above her face, and in the uneasy muscular movements of the lips and jaws, and in the vague noises in her throat. A tremendous pity for her re-entered his heart, almost breaking it, because she was so beaten, and so fallen from the gorgeousness of her splendour. 

Pathos mingles with realism in Arnold Bennett's description of the grimness in the death of Old Darius.

The spirit, after hiding within so long, had departed and left no trace. It had done with that form and was away. The vast and forlorn adventure of the little boy from the Bastile was over. Edwin did not know that the little boy from the Bastile was dead. He only knew that his father was dead. It seemed intolerably tragic also that death should have relieved him. 

Mr. Bennett's realistic handling of local color is skillfully done in his descriptions in Riceyman Steps. In the dreary quarters of King's Cross Road stood St. Andrew's church. High or low Arnold Bennett did not say. It was built in the reign of William IV and represented a mixed Gothic architecture.

The eye could not rest anywhere upon its surface without pain and time which is supposed to soften and dignify all things, had been content in malice to cover St. Andrew's with filth and ridicule. Out of the heights of the ignoble temple came persistent, monotonous, loud sounds, fantastic and nerve-racking, to match its architecture. 

Around St. Andrew's Riceyman Square had been built in the hungry forties. It consisted of groups of three story houses in stucco. The

1. Bennett, These Twain, p.426-27.
2. Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger, p. 545.
4. Ibid., p.63.
paint was peeling off and the stucco was crumbling, "the fronts of the door steps were green with vegetable growth."¹ "The Square had once been genteel," now, "it was merely decrepit, foul and slatternly." "Evolution had swirled around it, missed it, and left it. Neither electricity nor telephones had ever invaded it, and scores of windows still had Venetian blinds."² Certainly one must admit that Arnold Bennett's picture of the Square is realistic. But his cardinal stroke of realism is witnessed when he describes its atmosphere on a Sunday morning.

It lay now frowsily supine in a needed Sunday indolence after the week's hard labor. All the upper windows were shut and curtained, and most of the ground floor windows. The rare glimpses of forlorn interiors were desolating. Not a child played in the roadways. But here and there a house-wife had hung her doormats and canaries on the railings to take the holy Sabbath air, and newspapers, fresh as newly gathered frost, waited folded on doorsteps for students of crime and passion to awake from their beds in darkened and stifling rooms. Also little milk cans with tarnished brass handles had been suspended in clusters on the railings. Cats only, in their elegance and their detached disdain, rose superior to the terrific environment. The determined church-bells ceaselessly jangled.³

Bennett resembles William Wordsworth in his deep understanding of the common man. Through his realistic handling of his material, his keen observation of life, and his realistic descriptions, the Five Towns novels become an enlightening chronicle of his time. Realism with Arnold Bennett was the result of his determination to present life as it is.

¹ Arnold Bennett, Riceyan Steps, p.63.
² Ibid., p.63.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., p.64.
Like Dickens, in *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*, he has pointed his finger at the sordidness of poverty, with its evil and deadening influence, the injustices in economic and social tendencies, and the prejudices and narrowness of traditional Victorian customs. But unlike Dickens he does not use fiction for a vehicle of propaganda. He never preaches, nor moralizes, but skillfully, and realistically produces a graphic panorama of the realism of life in Victorian England in the Five Towns.

Arnold Bennett's realism is not of the French school, nor is it to be classed with the dark and hopeless realism of Hardy, nor the vulgar realism of Wells. It possesses an entirely individual cast, touched by his irony and his frank appeal to the humanity of all men. He does not sacrifice economy of descriptions, nor swiftness of movement when he wishes to create a realistic picture or mood. He is deliberate and firm in clarity when he desires to convey an emotion, a thought or a desire. Atmosphere, characters and inhibitions are studied and reproduced in a pattern of perfect realism. It is Arnold Bennett's vividness of realistic delineation that keeps him alive among the literary artists of his time.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Arnold Bennett in Relation to His Contemporaries

The four novelists who give the Edwardian period a place in literary history are John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and Joseph Conrad. All are critics of life, all in the tradition of evolution interpret characters through environment and all are literary artists.¹

These authors are the followers of Dickens and Thackeray in realistic art. They see the world as a whole, man impresses them when seen in a social group, they catch types, persons elude them. They are strongly conscious of the influence of environment upon the individual. Through the pages of their novels the reader becomes familiar with the localities these authors observe. They walk through the streets, visit the clubs, the shops, the factories, the mines, become guests in the dwellings of the characters, and even hear discussions on its religious political and educational problems.

To derive an adequate knowledge of the social tendencies and moods of an age, one must be familiar with several contemporary authors, who interpret existing conditions from their point of view.

Each author expresses not a stable state of things, but one which, whether he knows it or not, is in constant flux under his very eyes. The Edwardian movement became preoccupied with meditation on the privacies of the soul, and expressed more fully the social interests and passions of men.²

In order to see Arnold Bennett in relation to some of his contemporaries it would be well to list some of the characteristics of the Edwardian movement in literature of which Arnold Bennett is an interesting and definite product. During the Edwardian movement there was a direct break from Victorian principles that governed the writing of fiction. The novelist was no longer confined to a carefully constructed plot, niceties of style, and a definite pattern of form. Emphases were placed upon characterization, background, realism and autobiographical material. A new interest was centered in the aesthetic and philosophical problems of man and an attempt was made to analyse the stream of consciousness in the individual. In fact, all the principles of writing that governed Victorian fiction were revalued. Writing became a fine art which was expressed through the personality of the writer, and to the tempo of the times. To these innovations Arnold Bennett was a staunch adherent. Plot and style were of secondary importance, nor did he conform to any definite pattern of literary form. To him characterization and background were of cardinal importance. It was through his realistic handling of material and his constant shifting of the point of view that his narratives are convincing. Autobiographical material deftly interwoven with fiction lent the Five Towns' novels their peculiar life-like quality. Bennett's interest in the aesthetic and the philosophical problems of man was that of a sympathetic observer, rather than that of the moralizing reformer. He is neither morbid nor pessimistic. Bennett's central idea was to express his vision of society, to depict the struggles of the individual with fate and with his environment, and to record the injustices of social and economic tendencies.
Mr. Bennett happens to have worked over large canvases and has been inspired more by the character of a whole region than a few individuals; but actually, though he has sometimes taken over a few sociological tricks from his friend Mr. Wells, he is no sociologist. Like Mr. Wells he is fond of emphasizing the fact that times change and passages like this are common. John Baines had belonged to the past, to the age when men readily did think of their souls, when orators by phrases could move crowds to fury or pity, when no one had learned to hurry, when Demos was only turning in his sleep . . . . . mid-Victorian England sleeping in that mahogany bed. Ideals had passed away with John Baines. It is thus that ideals die; not in the conventional pageantry of honoured death, but sorrowly, ignobly, while one's head is turned. 1

"Mr. Bennett and Mr. Wells stand side by side in their generation, near enough and like enough to each other for comparison, diverse enough for a clash of opinion over their talents." 2 They both write of social institutions, religious dogma, the family, the home and the individual's behavior in relation to his environment.

Arnold Bennett's genius is original in the double vision which he brings to his creation of human consciousness, in his power to combine the sense of ironic detachment, from the lives he presents, with, at the same time, a complete identification with them. On the one hand we are made keenly conscious of how imperfectly they are exercised and trained, how much they miss of the potentialities of existence. This is just the impression which Wells also gives us, but Wells leaves us with that impression and nothing more. We never get away from that point of view. But Bennett goes further. Having shown us these lives as they appear in the light of a sophisticated, cultivated experience, he proceeds to identify himself with his creations, to show how these lives appear to themselves, and how viewed from that standpoint, nothing is lost to them, because the whole perspective is entirely altered.

He insists not only on the truth that environment influences character, but on the far bigger and more interesting truth that character triumphs over environment. . . . We never think of his characters as hopeless victims of environment, as we do of Hardy's characters and Wells' characters. . . . . Bennett is interested in the practice of life rather than the theory of life. The perception of a fact thrills him as the conception of an idea thrills Wells. Both of them illustrate with masterly skill and spirit the unfolding of the epoch preceding their own and that through which they themselves have lived, but they approach that material in entirely different ways. Bennett illustrates change simply as change, interesting to watch and analyse in the process of examining man in his environment, but not a matter to theorize about. Wells sees each step as a possibility in the evolution of Utopia. Change as change to him, means nothing unless it be a stage in development; the present or the past is only of interest in so far as it may affect the future.  

But it is interesting to note how differently they attack the same problems. Wells is dogmatic, critical and sarcastic. He exposes the social and economic evils that prevailed in the particular epoch that he is dealing with. He storms against materialism and industrialism and is abusive in his attack against society in its attitude to poverty. Mr. Wells' attitude to life is one of pessimism. He desires to create a Utopia, he wishes to change the entire social and economic world, but he offers no constructive remedy and he invariably leaves the individual without hope.

Arnold Bennett, a master writer of equal power, is the very antithesis of H.G. Wells in all these respects. It is with scorn and ridicule that Wells parades, before the reader, the stupid absurdities and idiosyncracies of society. But is with toleration and amusement that Bennett uses the

same material. He is neither angry nor sentimental and his irony is penetrated with pity. Wells is a propagandist, but Bennett never enters this field in fiction. His only concern is to faithfully represent life as he sees it, and this is one point in which they resemble each other. They are both realists, using the "novel as a flexible instrument of social ideas."¹

Arnold Bennett like H.G. Wells has produced a mass of pot-boiling material, but unlike Wells "he has not taken money for leaving it lukewarm; never at his worst has he fallen into the disgraceful slovenliness that spoils so much of Mr. Wells' later work."²

More aristocratic than H.G. Wells, he (Galsworthy) thus brought no less clear and no less bold a mind to the analysis of the social order; as representatives of his own country as Arnold Bennett, he more efficiently mingled the national instincts with the lessons of unashamed objectivity which English literature was receiving from the outside world.³

Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy describe, with detail, the physical surroundings of their characters. Both are deft in handling the interiors of the English home. Arnold Bennett centers his interest in the dwellings of the lower middle class, where simplicity is the keynote in the lives of its unpretentious inhabitants. In bedrooms comfort is sacrificed to frugality, for only the bare requisites of furnishings are deemed necessary to their existence. In the parlors, knick-knacks, foot stools and antimacassar covered monstrosities stuffed with horse hair are the only break in the cold interiors of these provincials. Galsworthy's observation of the British

². J.B. Priestley, Figures in Modern Literature, p.23.
³. Legouis, op.cit., p.1378.
interior is focused in the drawing rooms and boudoirs of the upper middle class who exact comfortable and pretentious living quarters. Bennett and Galsworthy have the tendency to give life to the physiognomy of their dwellings, factories and mills, which show how man reacts to his surroundings. The character of the settings reflect the personality of the inhabitants and vice versa. These sophisticated individuals sip after-dinner coffee in a formal, luxuriously furnished drawing room, lounge in a heated boudoir and stroll in a landscaped garden. Galsworthy selects London and its fashionable suburbs for the setting of his novels, while Bennett centers his interest in the provincial Five Towns. Both give the reader an excellent picture of the topography of these respective regions.

The themes in many of the novels of these contemporary novelists is the interplay of two motives, the quest for money and the quest for happiness. The old dispensation of the Victorian era is motivated entirely by acquisition of wealth, on the assumption that it included in itself all the elements needed to satisfy the requirements of a satisfactory existence. It was almost synonymous with happiness. The new generation was not quite satisfied with such a statement of the problem and like Bennett himself sought for satisfactions which could not always be stated in terms of money. To both Hilda and Edwin money was but a means to an end. For Edwin to satisfy his love for his craft and provide the requisites for Hilda's happiness. To Hilda it was a means of breaking down the bleak confines of Victorian middle class reality and emerging into the sun-lit, debonair, sensuous world of her own.

British stolidity, social smugness and conservatism are derided by both
Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett. Galsworthy's approach is satirical, while Bennett's approach is ironical. These British characteristics are seen by Galsworthy through his observation of the upper middle class, who have acquired great wealth through their landed investments. They stand aloof from the lower class, unaware of an existence but their own.

Arnold Bennett's observation, of the same characteristics, was through the conduct of the lower middle class, whose wealth has been acquired through the industries of the Five Towns. Galsworthy's interest is in humanity, rather than the individual and Bennett's interest is the reverse. Manners and social customs were important in the lives of the characters of Mr. Galsworthy and was the guiding principle in their conduct. Mr. Bennett thinks the contrary. Each portrays his characters as victims of their environment and their education, each has the ability to create a mood and each had a singleness of purpose. Neither of these novelists ever wastes times on minor characters nor unessential description, but focus their interest around the English family who is hemmed in by prejudices and narrow social customs. Each of these novelists uses the family to symbolize conservatism with a rebel member expressing himself antagonistically through modern tendencies. Labour and Capital are the conflicting factors in their industrial set up, with their sympathies strongly with the Labour movement.

Their women characters are not as definite as their men characters, however, each are splendidly realised. Both Galsworthy and Bennett write with sympathy and understanding in their interpretation of the prejudice of the rich, the miseries of the poor, and the barrier of class distinction, and neither offers a cure for the existing social evils of their times.
Joseph Conrad was the most eminent symptom of what the new literary cosmopolitanism of the twentieth century might become - if this vein is destined to grow broader. No one before him had so definitely broken the tight link which binds the artistic handling of a given tongue to the exclusive possession of an intellectual nationality. The language of his childhood and youth was Polish; it remained that of his inner speech, except in moments of literary labour, when French stepped into its place. He was strongly influenced by the literature of France, and his technique was derived from that which was taught by our realists. English, first studied in books, then fully adopted by his mature personality, was the instrument of expression which his art employed in the process of explicit realisation.  

Like Bennett he was influenced by Flaubert and Maupassant. Arnold Bennett and Joseph Conrad produce a composite picture of a section of life they knew from experience. Conrad, however, centers many of his novels on the sea and it is from the deck of a ship that he unrolls the panorama of English sea ports and foreign shores. Conrad's Lord Jim and Bennett's Clayhanger contain reminiscences of their youth.

Human life as Conrad had seen and experienced, since childhood was for most people a quiet desperation. The history of men on this earth might be written on a cigarette paper "in one phrase of infinite poignancy;" "they were born, they suffered, and they died." And yet it is a "great tale." . . . . Though Conrad's mind was inclined to dwell upon the hard lot of mankind he was no more as pessimist than was Plato . . . . His tales were life itself. His task was to transmit them into art.  

In the use of colloquial dialogue and the conduct of the characters is reflected the personality of the individual whose life and character is molded by his environment. Bennett's and Conrad's characters live cooped up in their own little world. Escape is not possible, innate honesty, as

1. Legouis, op. cit., p.1371.
2. Cross, op. cit., p.44.
in the case of Sophia, and innate heroism, as in the case of Lord Jim, are inhibitions too strongly imbedded to be cast aside. The characters of Lord Jim and Edwin Clayhanger are similar in respect to their pride, self-importance, and introspection. Lord Jim's antagonism is against the moral forces of the land, the physical force of the sea, while Clayhanger's antagonism is against the rigid discipline of his father and Victorian prejudice. They are both masters in building a background closely related to the motivation of the narrative. The vividness of their descriptions permits the reader to experience through the senses the very atmosphere they wish to create. Both Conrad and Bennett see the loneliness that surrounds the lives of their characters. Bennett interprets this quality of human nature through his servant characters, whose solitude is comparable to the solitude in the lives of Conrad's characters of the sea.

Bennett, Galsworthy, Wells, and Conrad were all novelists of manners, each with the power of observing and picturing their world. They all dealt with human nature and the influence of environment upon an individual. However, each dealt with different cross-sections of life; each was influenced by the character of his environment; and each reacted to these situations in accordance to his philosophy of life. With the exception of Conrad these realists deal with the muddle of family life. Unsympathetic parents are pitted against rebellious children; old and passing social customs are pushed aside for the new social tendencies of the times.
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